Marcel Ray Duriez

Nevaeh

Book: 45

The Pretender of Secrets

Partition: 1

(Back at Skaufyceol castle- and at the school)

‘We can’t…’

Rayne pulls on her knee socks, making sure they are of an exact equal height, accidentally giving the only real clue that helps me tell them apart.

‘Thanks to you, we’re stuck here forever,’ she mumbles, taking a moment to glare at me.

I glance at Neville- and Killie too, hoping she will and she would explain.

But she just shakes her head at her sister, before looking at me. ‘Ava’s gone.’ She shrugs. ‘But don’t let Rayne give you the wrong impression. We are quite happy to see you. We had a running bet on how soon you’d show.’

My gaze darts between them, laughing nervously as I say, ‘Oh really? Who won?’

Rayne rolls her eyes and points at her sister. ‘She did. I was sure you’d abandoned us for good.’

I pause, something about the way she just said that-'Wait, you mean

you guys have been here the whole time?'

'We can't get back.' Neville shrugs. 'We've lost our magic.'

'Well, I'm sure I can help you return. I mean, you do want to return-right?' I look at them, seeing Rayne smirk as Neville just nods.

Knowing they will be a lot easier than they think since all I must do is make the portal, get them settled, then say my goodbyes and make the return trip back to Laguna alone.

'We'd like that very much,' Neville says.

‘And we would like to leave now,’ Rayne adds, eyes narrowed. ‘After all, it’s the very least you can do.’

I swallow hard.

I deserve that, but I still wonder who is more desperate for them to leave, them or me?

I motion toward Rayne as I heard for the futon, wondering why neither of them thought to sleep on it instead of the floor.

‘Come,’ I say…

I was glancing over my shoulder.

‘You sit here on my right, and Neville, you sit here.’

I pat the lumpy cushion of the sofa.

‘Now grab my hands and close your eyes, then focus on seeing the portal with all of you might.’

Imagining that golden shimmer of light as though it is before you.

Besides as soon as the image is clear, I want you to see yourself stepping right through, knowing I am right there beside you, keeping you safe. Okay…?’

I peek at them, seeing them nod before we go through the motions, recreating all the right steps.

But just as I step through the light and into that vast fragrant field, I open my eyes and find I am alone.

‘Told you,’ Rayne says, the second I return. Standing before me, eyes angry, small, accusing, pale hands clutching her plaid skirted hips. And it’s all because we tried to help you!’

‘Told you our magic is gone. We are stuck here now with no way to get back.’

‘Rayne!’ Neville shakes her head at her sister, then glances at me with an apologetic look on her face.

‘Well, it’s true!’ Rayne glares. ‘I told you we shouldn’t risk it. I told you she would not listen.

Partition: 2

I saw it clear as day. The overwhelming possibility she’d make the wrong choice- which, I might add, she did!’ She shakes her head and frowns. ‘It went exactly as predicted. And now we’re the ones paying the price.’

Oh, you are not the only ones, I think. Hoping they have lost their ability to read minds as well since I am immediately shamed by the thought. No matter how much she is annoying me, I know she is right.

'Listen,' I say, swallowing hard as I glance at them, needing to defuse them. 'I know how bad you want to get back. Trust me, I do. And I'm going to do everything I can to help you.' I nod, seeing them glance at each other, two identical faces marred by complete disbelief. 'I mean, I'm not exactly sure how I'm going to do it, but just trust that I will. I will do everything I can to

help you get back. And in the meantime, I will do everything I can to keep you both comfortable and safe. Scout's Jewell. Okay?'

Rayne looks at me, rolling her eyes and having a sigh. 'Just get us back to school,' she says, arms crossing her chest. 'That's all we want. Nothing short of that will do.'

I nod, refusing to let her get to me when I say, 'Understood. But if I am going to help you, I'll need you to answer some questions.'

They look at each other, Rayne's gaze signaling a silent: No

way, as Neville turns, nodding at me as she says, ‘Okay.’

And even though I am not sure how to phrase it, it is something I have been wondering for a while now, so I just dive in. ‘I’m sorry if the offends you, but I need to know are you guys dead?’ I hold my breath, fully expecting them to be mad, or at the very least insulted- any reaction but the laughter I get. Watching as they fall all over themselves, Rayne doubled over, slapping her knee, as Neville rolls off the futon, practically convulsing. ‘Well, you can’t blame me for asking.’ I frown, the one who is insulted. ‘I mean, we did

meet in School where plenty of dead people spend time together. Not to mention how you're both unnaturally pale.'

Rayne leans against the wall, fully recovered from her laughing fit, and smirked at me. 'So, we're pale. Big deal.' She glances at her sister, then back at me. 'It's not like you're exactly rocking' a tan. And yet, you don't see us assuming you're a member of the dearly departed.'

I wince, knowing it is true, but still. 'Yeah, well, you had an unfair advantage. Thanks to Riley you knew all about me long before we met. You

knew exactly who I am and what I am, and if I have any hope of helping you, then I am going to have to know a few things too. So as much as you may resent it, as much as you may want to resist, the only way we're going to get anywhere is if you tell me your story.'

'Never,' Rayne says, staring at her sister, warning her not to rebel.

But Neville ignores her and turns right to me. 'We're not dead. Not even close. We are more like- refugees. Refugees from the past if you will.'

I glance between them, thinking all I must do is lower my

guard, focus my quantum remote, and touch them for their entire life story to be revealed, but figuring I should at least try to get their version first.

‘A long time ago,’ she starts, peering at her disapproving sister before taking a deep breath and forging ahead. ‘An exceptionally long time ago we were facing a-' She squinches her brow, searching for just the right word, nodding at me when she says, ‘Well, let us just say we were about to become victims of a dark event, one of the most shameful times in our history, but we escaped by fleeing to School. And then, well, we lost track of time and we have

been there ever since. Or at least until last week when we came to help you.'

Rayne groans, dropping to the floor and burying her face in her hands, but Neville just ignores her, still looking at me when she says, 'But now our worst fear has come true. Our magic is gone, we've nowhere to go, and no idea how to survive in the place.'

'What sort of persecution did you flee?' I ask, watching her closely, searching for clues. 'And how long ago is exceptionally long ago? Just what are we dealing with here?' Wondering if their history stretches as far back as

Naddalin’s, or if they belong to a more recent past.

They gaze at each other, communicating a wordless agreement that shuts me right out. So, I move toward Neville, grasping her hand so quickly she has no time to react. Immediately pulled into her mind- her world- seeing the story unfold as though I am right there. Standing on the sidelines, an unnoticed observer, fully immersed in the chaos and fear of that day, witness to images so horrible I am tempted to turn away.

Watching as an angry mob swarms their home, voices raised-

torchers high- their aunt barring the door as best she can, making the portal and urging the twins toward the safety of School.

About to step through the portal and join them when the door gives way and the twins disappear. Separated from everything they once knew, having no idea what became of their aunt until a visit to the Great Halls of Learning showed them the torturous trial of false accusations she was forced to endure. Refusing to confess to any kind of sorcery, having taken the Wiccan Rede of ‘An it harms none, does what ye will,’ and knowing

she had done nothing wrong, she rebuffed her oppressor and held her head high to the gallows where she was brutally hung.

I stagger back, fingers seeking the amulet just under my tee, something about their aunt's gaze so eerily familiar, leaving me shaky, unsettled, reminding myself that I am safe, they are safe- that things like that do not happen these days.

'So now you know.' Neville shrugs as Rayne shakes her head. 'Our whole story. Everything about us. Do you blame us for choosing to hide?'

I glance at them, unsure of what to say. ‘I-' I clear my throat and start over. ‘I’m so sorry. I had no idea.’ I glance at Rayne, seeing how she refuses to look at me, then over at Neville who solemnly bows her head. ‘I had no idea you guys escaped the Salem Witch Trials.’

‘Not exactly,’ Rayne says, before Neville cheers in.

‘What she means is we were never tried. Our aunt stood accused. One day she was revered as the most sought-after midwife, and the next, she was rounded up and taken away.’ She

sucks in her breath, eyes welling up as though it were yesterday.

‘We would’ve gone with her, we had nothing to hide,’ Rayne says, lifting her chin and narrowing her gaze. ‘And it certainly wasn’t Clara’s fault that poor baby died. It is the father who did it. She did not want the baby or its mother. So, she did away with them both and blamed Clara. Crying witch so loud the entire town heard- but then Clara made the portal and forced us to hide, and she was just about to join us when- well, you know the rest.’

‘But that was over three hundred years ago!’ I cry, still unused

to the idea of existence that long despite my immortality.

The twins shrug.

‘So, if you haven’t been back since-' I shake my head, the monumental size of the problem just beginning to unfold. ‘I mean, do you have any idea how much things have changed since you were last here? Seriously. It’s like a whole different world from the one that you left.’

‘It’s not like we’re idiots.’ Rayne shakes her head. ‘Things progress in School too, you know. New people arrive all the time, manifesting

the things they're attached to, all the stuff they can't bear to let go.'

But that is not what I meant, in fact, not even close. I was not just referring to cars versus horse-drawn carriages, and trendy boutiques versus hand-sewn- but more their ability to get along in the world- blending in, adapting, not standing out in the glaring way that they do! Taking in their razor- slashed bangs, their large dark eyes, and extremely pale skin, knowing their twenty-first-century makeover is far less about a uniform change than a complete and total overhaul.

‘Besides, Riley prepared us,’ Neville says, eliciting a loud groan from Rayne, and my full attention from me. ‘She manifested a private school and convinced us to enroll. That is where these uniforms came from. She was our teacher, coaching us on all the modern ways, including our speech. She wanted us to return and was determined to prepare us for the trip. Partly because she wanted us to look after you, and partly because she thought we were crazy for missing our teens.’

I freeze, suddenly grasping a new understanding of Riley’s interest in

the- one that has far less to do with me, and everything to do with her. ‘How old are you guys?’ I whimper, looking to Neville for the answer. ‘Or should I say, how old were you when you first arrived in School?’ Knowing they have not aged a day since.

‘Thirteen,’ Neville says, knitting her brow. ‘Why?’

I close my eyes and shake my head, stifling a laugh as I think: I knew it!

Riley always dreamed of the day she would be thirteen, a bona fide teenager having finally made it to the

important double digits. But after dying at twelve, she chose to hang around the earth plane, living her adolescence vicariously through me. So, it only makes sense she would try to convince Neville and Rayne to return, not wanting anyone else to miss out like her.

And if Clara can find the strength, and Riley the hope, in situations so incredibly dire and bleak, surely, I can overcome Naddalin.

I glance between the twins, knowing they cannot stay here on their own or come home to live with Jaylynn and me, though there is quite able and

ready, if not entirely willing to lend us a hand.

‘Grab your stuff,’ I say, heading for the door. ‘I’m taking you to your new home.’

The second we step outside I realize we will need a car. And since I am more interested in speed than comfort, especially after seeing the way the twins cling to each other as they gaze around warily, I manifest something that will get us there fast and quickly herd them in. Ordering Neville to sit on Rayne’s lap as I get myself settled and step on the gas, navigating the streets with surprising

skill, while the twins practically spend time together the window, gaping at all that we pass.

‘Have you guys been inside the whole time?’ I glance at them, never having seen anyone react to the beauty of Laguna Beach in quite the same way.

They nod, never once averting their gaze. Squirming in their seat as I pull up to the gate. Allowing the uniformed guard to peer through the window and scrutinize them, before letting us in.

‘Where are you taking us?’ Rayne eyes me suspiciously. ‘What’s

with the guards and big gates? Is prison?'

I head up the hill, glancing at her when I say, 'Don't you have gated communities in School?' Never actually having seen one myself, but then again, I have not lived there for the last three centuries as they have.

They shake their heads, eyes wide, clearly on edge.

'Not to worry.' I turn onto Naddalin's street and into her drive. 'It's not a prison, that's not what the gates are for. They're more to keep people out rather than in.'

‘But why would you want to keep people out?’ they ask, two childlike voices blending into one.

I squint, having no idea how to answer since it is not like I was raised like the either, all the communities in my old hood were direct access. ‘It’s meant to keep people-' I start to say safe, but that is not it either. ‘Anyway.’ I shake my head. ‘If you are going to live here, then you better get used to it. That’s all there is.’

‘But we’re not going to live here,’ Rayne says. ‘You said it was just a temporary fix until you find a way to get us back, remember?’

I take a deep breath and grip the wheel harder, reminding myself how scared she must feel, no matter how bratty she gets.

‘Of course, it’s temporary.’ I nod, forcing a smile. Or at least it better be, because if not, someone is going to be extremely displeased. I climb out of the car and motion for them to follow, saying, ‘Ready to see your new temporary home?’

I head for the door, the two of them close at my heels as I stand right before it, debating whether I should knock and wait for Naddalin to open it or just stride right in since she is

asleep. And I am about to do the latter when Naddalin swings the door open, takes one look at me, and says, ‘Are you okay?’

I smile, tacking on a telepathic message of Before you say anything- anything at all just tries to stay calm and give me a chance to explain her eyes curious, questioning as I say, ‘Can we come in?’

She moves aside, eyes wide with shock when Neville and Rayne step out from behind me and barrel right into her. Skinny arms wrapped around her waist, gazing up at her adoringly as they squeal, ‘Naddalin! It

is you! It’s you!’ And as nice as the little reunion is, I cannot help but notice how their reaction to her, with all the love and excitement, is the opposite of their reaction to me.

She smiles, ruffling their hair and bending down to plant a kiss on the top of their heads. ‘How long has it been?’ She pulls away and squints.

‘Last week,’ Rayne says, complete adoration displayed on her face. ‘Seconds before Ever added her blood to the antidote and wrecked everything.’

‘Rayne!’ Neville glances at her sister and me, shaking her head. But I just let it go. The is one battle I will never win.

‘I meant before that.’ Naddalin squints into the distance, trying to remember the date.

They look at her, a mischievous gleam in their eyes when they say, ‘It was just over six years ago when Ever was ten!’

I gape, eyes practically popping out of my head as Naddalin laughs. ‘Ah, yes. And I have you two to thank for helping me find her. And

since you know how much she means to me, I would appreciate your kindness toward her. That's not too much to ask is it?' She chucks Rayne under the chin, causing her to smile as her cheeks flush bright pink.

'So, to what do I owe the incredible Jewell?' She leads us into the still empty living room. 'Of being reunited with my long-lost friends, who, I might add, hasn't aged a day since we met.'

They look at each other and giggle, clearly prepared to be charmed by anything she says. And before I can even think of a reply, find the right

words to slowly break her in and get her used to the idea of their living with her, they look at each other and shout, ‘Ever said we could live with you!’

Naddalin glances at me, smile still planted on her face, as a look of pure horror creeps into her eyes.

‘Temporarily,’ I add, gaze meeting her, sending a barrage of telepathic red tulips her way. ‘Just until I find a way to get them back to school, or their magic returns, whichever comes first.’ Tacking on a mental note of Remember when you said you wanted to improve your karma, to make up for your past? Well, what better way

than to help someone in need? And the way you can keep the house since you will need the extra space. It is the perfect solution. Everyone wins! Nodding and smiling so eagerly I am like a bobblehead doll.

Naddalin glances first at me, then the twins, laughing and shaking her head when she says, ‘Of course you can stay. For as long as you need. So, what do you say we all head upstairs, so you can pick out your rooms?’

I sigh, my perfect boyfriend proving herself even more perfect. Following behind as the twins race up the stairs- happy, giggling, completely

transformed now that they are in Naddalin's care.

'Can we have the room?' They ask, eyes lighting up as they stand in the doorway of Naddalin's special room that is still devoid of her things.

'No!' I answer too quickly, wincing when they turn, eyes narrowed and glaring at me. But even though I feel bad about the negative start, I am decided to return the room to its normal state, and there is no way I can do that if they are camping in it. 'It's taken,' I add, knowing it did nothing to soften the blow. 'But there is plenty

more, the place is huge, you'll see. There's even a pool!'

Neville and Rayne glance at each other before marching down the hall heads bobbing together, whispering, not bothering to hide their annoyance with me.

You could have just given it to them, Naddalin thinks, close enough to send a charge through my veins.

I shake my head and walk silently alongside her, telepathically replying, I want to see it filled with your things. Even though they no longer mean anything to you, they

mean a great deal to me. You cannot just toss out the past- cannot just turn your back on the things that defined you.

She stops, turning to me as she says, ‘ever, we are not defined by our things. It’s not the clothes that we wear, the cars that we drive, the art we acquire- it’s not where we live- but how we live that defines us.’ Her gaze bores into mine, as she gathers me into a telepathic embrace, the effect seeming so real, it robs me of breath. ‘It’s our actions that are remembered long after we’re gone,’ she adds, smoothing my

hair as her lips telepathically meet mine.

True- I smile, enhancing the image she created with tulips and sunsets and rainbows and cupids and all manner of clichéd Dadaistic themes that make us both laugh. Except that we are immortal, I add, decided to sway her to my side. This means none of that applies. So, with that in mind, we can just-

But I do not even get to finish before the twins call for us, shouting, ‘The room! I want the one!’

Since the twins are so used to being together, I was sure they would want to share the same space and even get bunk beds or something. But the moment they checked out the size of the next room, and the one after that, they each staked their claim and never looked back. Spending the next several hours directing Naddalin and me to decorate down to their most minute specifications, demanding we manifest beds, dressers, and shelves, only to change their minds, have us empty the room, and start all over again.

But if Naddalin was using her magic, I did not complain. I was far too

relieved to see her manifesting again, even if she was still refusing to manifest anything for herself. By the time we finished, the sun was starting to rise, and I knew I had better return home before Jaylynn woke up and noticed I was gone.

‘Don’t be surprised if I don’t make it to school today,’ she says, walking me to the front door.

I sigh, hating the thought of going without her.

‘I can’t leave them here on their own. Not until they get settled in.’ She shrugs, hooking her thumb over

her shoulder and pointing upstairs where the twins are finally, mercifully, asleep in their beds.

I nod, knowing she is right and vowing to get them back to School soon before they get too comfortable here.

‘I’m not sure that’s the solution,’ she says, sensing my thoughts.

I squint, unsure where she is going, but getting an uncomfortable ping in my gut nonetheless.

‘I’ve been thinking-' She cocks her head to the side, thumb tracing her stubble- lined chin. ‘They’ve been

through a lot- losing their home, their families, everything they've ever know she and loved their lives taken so abruptly, they hadn't had a chance to even live them-' She shakes her head. 'They deserve a real childhood, you know? A fresh start in the world…'

I gape, wanting to respond but the words just will not come. Because while I also want them to be happy and safe and all those things, as far as the rest goes, we are no longer on the same page. I was planning a short little visit, a couple of days, or at the very worst- weeks. Never once did I entertain the idea of becoming surrogate parents,

especially to twins who are just a few years younger than me.

‘It was just a thought.’ She shrugs. ‘Ultimately, the decision is theirs. It’s their life.’

I swallow hard and avert my gaze, telling myself the is nothing that has to be settled just yet, heading toward my manifested car when Naddalin says, ‘Always- Seriously? A Lamborghini?’

I cringe, flushing under her gaze. ‘I needed something fast.’ I shrug, knowing she is not buying it the second I see her face. ‘They feared to

be outside, so I needed to get them here quickly.'

'And did it need to be shiny and red as well?' She laughs, glancing between the car and me and shaking her head.

I press my lips together and look away, refusing to say anything more. I mean, it is not like I was planning to keep it. I will get rid of it the second I get home and pull into my drive.

I open the door and climb in, suddenly remembering the thing I meant to ask her before. Taking in the

elegant lines of her face as I say, ‘Hey Naddalin- how’d you open the door so quickly? How’d you know we were here?’

She looks at me, eyes meeting mine as the smile slowly fades from her face.

‘I mean, it was four in the morning. I did not even have a chance to knock and you were already there. Weren’t you asleep?’

-And-

Like even though a chunk of flashy red metal stands between us, it is as though she is right there, gaze

sending shivers over my skin when she says, ‘Ever, I can always sense when you’re near.’

After a long day at school without Naddalin, the second the final bell rings, I get in my car and head for her house. But instead of making a left at the light, I pull an illegal U-turn. Telling myself I should allow her some space, give her a chance to bond with the twins- when the truth is, between their hero worship of Naddalin and Rayne’s glaring animosity toward me- well, I am just not ready to face them again.

I head toward downtown Laguna, figuring I will stop by Mystics and Moonbeams, the metaphysical bookstore where Ava once worked. Thinking Lina, the store's owner can help me find a solution to my more mystical problems without my divulging just what it is that I am after. Which, considering how suspicious she is, should prove to be quite a feat.

After manifesting the best parking space, I can, which is overcrowded Laguna happens to be two blocks away, I stuff the meter full of quarters and make my way toward the

door, only to be met by a big red sign reading: BE BACK IN TEN!

I stand before it, lips pressed together as I glance all around, making sure no one is watching as I mentally flip the sign over while making the deadbolt retreat. Silencing the bell on the door as I slip inside and head for the bookshelves, relishing the chance to browse on my own, free of Lina's scrutiny.

The tips of my fingers graze the long row of spines, waiting for a signal, sudden warming, an itch at the tips, something to alert me to just the right one. But not getting anything, I grab

one near the end and close my eyes, pressing my palms to the front and back covers, eager to see what is inside.

‘How’d you get in here?’

I jump, bumping into the shelf just behind me, knocking a pile of CDs to the floor.

Cringing at the mess at my feet, scattered jewel cases everywhere, some of them cracked, as I say, ‘You scared me- I-'

I drop to my knees, heart racing, face flushing, wondering not just who she is but how she could have

managed to sneak up on me when it should be impossible to do so. A mortal's energy always announces itself long before its actual presence does. So, is it possible that she- is not mortal?

I sneak a quick peek as she kneels beside me, taking in her tanned skin, defined arms, and a heavy clump of golden- brown dreadlocks spilling over her shoulder and halfway down her back. Watching as she gathered the damaged jewel cases into her hands, searching for a sign that will out her as an immortal, even a rogue.

A face that is too perfect- a Faith tattoo- but when she catches me

looking, her smile in a way that not only displays the most disarming set of dimples perfectly punctuating each cheek but a set of teeth that are just crooked enough to prove she is nothing like me, I say.

'You okay?' She asks, gazing at me with eyes so green I can barely remember my name.

I nod, standing awkwardly and rubbing my palms on my jeans, wondering why I'm so breathless, unnerved, forcing the words from my lips when I say, 'Yeah. I'm- fine.' Inadvertently taking a nervous laugh onto the end that is so high pitched and

foolish I cringe and turn away. ‘I, um- I was just, browsing the merchandise,’ I add, realizing just after I have said it that I have more right to be here than she does.

Glancing over my shoulder to find her gazing at me in a way I cannot read, I take a deep breath and pull my shoulders back. ‘The real question is, how’d you get in here?’ Taking in her sandy bare feet and wet board shorts hanging dangerously low on her hips, averting my gaze before- I can see anything more.

‘I own the place.’ She then nods, stacking the fallen CDs, the ones

that are not cracked, back onto the shelf before turning to me.

‘Really?’ I turn, eyes narrowed when I add, because I happen to know the owner, and you don’t look a thing like her.’

She then cocks her head to the side, squinting in faux contemplation and rubbing her chin as she says, ‘Really? Most people claim to see a resemblance. Though I must admit, I am with you, never seen it myself.’

‘You’re related to Lina?’ I gape, hoping my voice did not sound as panicked to her ears as it did mine.

‘She’s my grandmother.’ She nods. ‘Name’s Naddalin.’

She offers her hand, long, tanned, fingers extended, waiting for mine. But even though my curiosity’s piqued, I cannot do it. Despite my interest, despite my wondering why she makes me feel so- flustered and off-balance- I cannot risk the barrage of knowledge a single touch brings when my psyche is disturbed.

I nod, responding with the stupid, embarrassing half-wave, as I mumble my name. Trying not to wince when she gives me an odd look and lowers her hand again.

‘So, now that that’s covered-'

She slings her damp towel over her shoulder, sending a spray of sand through the room. ‘I’m back to my original question, what are you doing in here?’

I turn, feigning sudden interest in a book on dream interpretation when I say, ‘I’m sticking with my original answer, which was browsing, in case you’ve forgotten. Surely you allow browsers in here?’ I turn, meeting her gaze- those amazing sea-green eyes reminding me of an ad for a tropical getaway. Something about them so- indefinable- startling- and yet-

strangely familiar- though I am sure I have never seen her before.

She laughs, pushing a tangle of golden dreads off her face and exposing a scar slicing right through her brow, gaze landing just to my right as she says, ‘And yet, after all the summers I’ve spent here, watching customers browse the merchandise, I’ve never once seen someone browse quite like you.’

Her lips pull at the sides, as her eyes study mine. Then I turn, cheeks hurting, heart racing, taking a moment to compose myself before turning back to say, ‘You’ve never seen

someone browse the back cover? That is a little odd, don't you think?'

'Not with their eyes closed.' She tilts her head to the side and focuses on the space to my right once again.

I swallow hard, flustered, shaky, knowing I need to change the subject before I sink any deeper. 'Maybe you should be more concerned with how I got in here instead of what I am doing in here,' I say, wishing I could take it back the second it is out.

She looks at me, gazes narrowed. ‘Figured I left the door open again. Are you saying I didn’t?’

‘No!’ I shake my head, hoping she does not notice the way my cheeks color and heat. ‘No, that’s- that’s exactly what I’m saying. You did leave the door open,’ I add, trying not to fidget, blink, press my lips together, or otherwise give myself away. ‘Wide open in fact, which is not only a waste of air-conditioning but totally- I’ I stop, my stomach going weird when I see the smile at play on her lips.

‘So, a friend of Lina’s, huh?’ She moves toward the register,

dropping her towel on the counter in a wet, sandy thud. ‘Never heard her mention you before.’

‘Well, we weren’t exactly friends.’ I shrug, hoping it did not look as awkward as it felt. ‘I mean, I met her once and she helped me with- wait, why did you just phrase it like that? You know, all past tense. Is Lina okay?’

She nods, perching on a stool, grabbing a purple cardboard box from a drawer, and flipping through a bunch of receipts. ‘She’s on one of her annual retreats. Picks a different one each year. The time it is Mexico. Trying to decide if the Mayans were right and the

world will end in 2012. What's your take?'

She looks at me, green eyes curious, insistent, boring right into mine. But I just scratch my arm and shrug, never having heard that theory before and wondering if it applies to Naddalin and me. Is that when we will head for the Shadowland, or will we be forced to wander barren Earth- the last two survivors responsible for repopulating the land-only- irony alert- if we touch, Naddalin dies- I shake my head, eager to escape that thread before it can take hold and mess with my head. Besides, I am here for a

reason and I need to stick with the plan.

‘So how do you know her? If you weren’t exactly friends.’

‘I met her through Ava,’ I say, hating the feel of her name on my lips.

She then rolls her eyes, mumbling something unintelligible and shaking her head.

‘So, you know her?’ I look at her, allowing my gaze to travel her face, her neck, her shoulders, her smooth tanned chest, making my way down to her navel, before forcing myself to look away again.

‘Yeah, I know her.’ She then pushes the box aside, gaze meeting mine. ‘Just up and disappeared the other day- into thin air from what I can tell-'

Oh, you do not know the half of it, I think, carefully watching her face.

‘Called her house, her cell, but nothing. Finally did a drive-by to make sure she was okay, and the lights were on so it’s clear she’s been dodging me.’ She shakes her head. ‘Left me with a bunch of angry clients, demanding a reading. Who would’ve thought she’d turn out to be such a flake?’

Yes, who would have thought? Certainly not the person who was foolish enough to place her deepest darkest secrets right into her greedy, outstretched, hands...

‘Still, haven’t found anyone good enough to replace her though. And let me tell ya, it is impossible to give readings and take care of the store. That’s why I stepped out just now.’ She shrugs. ‘Surf was calling, and I needed a break. Guess I left the door open again.’

Her eyes meet mine, sparkling and deep. And I cannot tell if she honestly believes she left the door

open, or if she suspects me. But when I try to peer into her head to see for myself, I am stopped by the wall she is erected to safeguard her thoughts from people like me. All I must go by is the brilliant purple aura I failed to see before- it is color waving and swaying, beckoning to me.

'So far all I got are a stack of applications from amateurs. But I am so desperate to get my weekends back, I'm ready to toss their names in a bowl and pick one just to get it over with.' She shakes her head and flashes those dimples again.

-And-

Even though part of me cannot believe what I am about to do, the other part, the more practical part, urges me on, recognizing the perfect opportunity when it is standing before me.

‘Maybe I can help.’ I hold my breath as I wait for her reply. But when my only response is a set of narrowed lids accompanied by the slightest curling of lips, I add, ‘Seriously. You don’t even have to pay me!’

She squints even further, those amazing green eyes practically disappearing.

‘What I meant was you don’t have to pay me all that much,’ I say, not wanting to come off as some weird desperate freak who gives it away for free. ‘I’ll work for just over minimum wage- but only because I’m so good I’ll be living off the tips.’

‘You’re psychic?’ She folds her arms and tilts her head back, gazing at me with complete disbelief.

I straighten my posture and try not to fidget. Hoping to appear professional, mature, someone she can trust to help run her store. ‘Yup…’ I nod, unable to keep from wincing, unused to confiding my abilities to

anyone, much less a stranger. ‘I just sort of know things- the information just sort of comes to me it's hard to explain.’

She looks at me, wavering, then focusing just to my right as she says, ‘So what exactly are you then?’

I shrug, fingers playing with the zipper on my hoodie, drawing it up and down, down, and up, having no idea what she means.

‘Are your clairaudient, clairvoyant, clairsentient, clairgustance, Clair-sent, or clairt-agency? Which is it?’ She shrugs.

‘All of the above.’ I nod, having no idea what half those things mean, but figuring if it has anything even remotely to do with psychic abilities, then I can do it.

‘But you’re not mediumistic,’ she says, as though it is a fact.

‘I can see spirits.’ I shrug. ‘But only the ones that are still here, not the ones who’ve crossed-' I stop, pretending to clear my throat, knowing it is better not to mention the bridge, School, or any of that. ‘- I can’t see the ones who’ve crossed over.’ I shrug, hoping she does not try to push it since that is as far as I will go.

She squints, gazes roaming from the top of my pale blond head and down to my Nike clad feet. A gaze that makes my whole- body quiver. Reaching for a long-sleeved tee stashed under the counter and yanking it over her head before she looks at me and says, ‘Well, eternally, if you want to work here, you’re going to have to pass the audition.’

Naddalin locks the front door then leads me down a short hall and into a small room on the right. I follow behind, hands flexed by my sides, staring at the peace sign on the back of her tee and reminding myself that if

she does anything creepy, I can take her down quickly and make her regret the day she ever went after me.

She motions toward a padded foldable chair facing a small square table covered by a shiny blue cloth, taking the seat just opposite me and propping her barefoot on her knee as she says, ‘So, what’s your specialty?’

I gaze at her, hands folded, focusing on taking slow deep breaths while trying not to squirm.

‘Tarot cards? Runes? I Ching? Psychometry? Which is it?’

I glance at the door, knowing I could reach it in a fraction of a second, which might cause a stir, but so what?

‘You are going to give me a reading, right?’ Her gazes' levels on mine. ‘You do realize that’s what I meant by audition?’ She laughs, displaying a matching set of dimples as she swings her dreads over her shoulder and laughs some more.

I stare at the tablecloth, tracing the bumpy raw silk with my fingers, heart rising to my cheeks when I remember Naddalin’s last words, how she can always sense me, and hoping

she was just saying that- that she cannot sense me now.

'I don't need anything,' I mumble, still unwilling to meet her gaze. 'All I need is a quick touch of your hand and I'm good to go.'

'Palmistry,' she nods. 'Not what I would've expected, but okay.' She leans toward me, hands open, palms up, ready to go.

I swallow hard, seeing the deeply etched lines, but that is not where the story lives- at least not for me. 'I don't read 'em,' I say, voice betraying my nervousness, as I work up

the courage to touch her. ‘It’s more the- the energy- I just- tune into it. That’s where all the info is.’

She pulls back, studying me so closely I cannot meet her eyes. Knowing I need to just touch her, get it over with.

-And-

I need to do it now.

‘Is it just the hand, or- ?’ She flexes her fingers, the calluses lining her palms rising and falling again.

I clear my throat, wondering why I am so nervous, why I feel like I am betraying Naddalin when all I am

trying to do is land a job that will make my aunt happy. ‘No, it can be anywhere. Your ear, your nose, even your big toe- does not matter, it all reads the same. The hand’s just more accessible, you know?’

‘More accessible than the big toe?’ She smiles, those sea-green eyes seeking mine.

I take a deep breath, thinking how coarse and rough her hands appear, especially compared to Naddalin’s whose are almost softer than mine. And somehow, even just the thought of that makes the whole moment feels off. Now that our touch is

forbidden, just being alone with another guy feels sordid, illicit, wrong.

I reach toward her, eyes shut tight, reminding myself it is just a job interview- that there is no reason I cannot land the thing quickly and painlessly. Pressing my finger to the center of her palm and feeling the soft, gentle give of her flesh.

Allowing her stream of energy to flow through me- so peaceful, serene, it is like wading into the calmest of seas. So different from the rush of tingle and heart I have grown used to with Naddalin- at least until the shock of Naddalin's life story unfolds.

I yank my hand back as though I have been stung, fumbling for the amulet just under my top, noting the alarm on her face as I rush to explain. ‘I’m sorry.’ I shake my head, angry with myself for overreacting. ‘Normally I wouldn’t do that. Normally I am more discreet. I was just a little surprised that is all. I didn’t expect to see anything quite so-' I stop, knowing my inane babbling is only making it worse. ‘Normally, when I give readings, I hide my reactions much better than that.’ I nod, forcing my gaze to meet her, knowing whatever I say will not hide

the fact that I choked like the worst amateur.

‘Seriously…’ I smile, lips stretching in a way that cannot be convincing; ‘I’m like the ultimate poker face.’ Peering at her again and seeing the is not working. ‘A poker face that is also full of empathy and compassion,’ I stammer, unable to stop the runaway train. ‘I mean, really- I’m just- full of it-' I cringe, shaking my head as I gather my things so I can stop for the day. There is no way hell he will hire me now.

She slides to the edge of her seat, leaning so close I struggle to

breathe. ‘So-o, tell me,’ she says, gaze like a hand on my wrist, holding me in place. ‘What exactly did you see?’

I swallow hard, closing my eyes for a moment and replaying the movie I just saw in my head. The images so clear, dancing before me, as I say, ‘you’re different.’ I peer at her, her body unmoving, gaze steady, allowing no clues as to whether I am on track.

‘But then, you’ve always been different. Ever since you were little you’ve seen them.’ I swallow hard and avert my gaze, the image of her in her crib, smiling and waving at the

grandmother who passed years before her birth now etched in my brain.

‘And when-' I pause, not wanting to say it, but knowing that if I want the job, then I had better get to it. ‘But when your father- shot herself- back when you were ten- you thought you were to blame. Convinced your insistence on seeing your mother, who passed just one year before, somehow sent her over the edge. It was years before you accepted the truth, that your father was just lonely, depressed, and anxious to be with your mother again. Even so, sometimes you still doubt it.’

I gaze at her, noting how she has not so much as flinched, though something in those deep green eyes hints at the truth.

‘She tried to visit a few times. Wanting to apologize for what she did, but even though you sensed her, you blocked it. Sick of being teased by your classmates and scolded by the nuns- not to mention your foster dad who-' I shake my head, not wanting to continue, but knowing I must.

‘You just wanted to be normal.’ I shrug. ‘Treated like everyone else.’ I trace my fingers over the tablecloth, throat beginning to tighten, knowing

exactly how it feels to long to fit in, all the while knowing you never truly can. ‘But after you ran away and met Lina, who is not your real grandmother- your real grandparents are dead.’ I look at her again, wondering if she is surprised that I knew that but she gives nothing away. ‘Anyway, she took you in, fed you, clothed you, she…’

‘She saved my life.’ She sighs, leaning back in her seat, long tanned fingers rubbing her eyes. ‘In many ways. I was so lost and she-'

‘Accepted you for who you are.’ I nod, seeing the whole story before me, as though I am right there.

‘And who’s that?’ She asks hands splayed on her knees, gazing at me. ‘Who am I really?’

I look at her, not even pausing when I say, ‘A guy so smart you finished high school in tenth grade. A guy with such amazing mediumistic abilities you have helped hundreds of people and asked extraordinarily little in exchange. And yet, despite all of that, you are also a guy who’s So-o-' I look at her, lips lifting at the corners. ‘Well, I was going to say lazy- but since I do want the job, I’ll say laid-back instead.’ I laugh, relieved when she laughs along with me. ‘And given the

choice, you'd never work another day. You'd spend the rest of eternity just searching for that one perfect wave.'

'Is that a metaphor?' She asks, a crooked smile on her face.

'Not in your case.' I shrug. 'In your case, it's a fact.'

She then nods, leaning back in her chair, gazing at me in a way that makes my stomach dance. Dropping forward again, feet flat on the floor when she says, 'Guilty.' Eyes wistful, searching mine. 'And now, since there are no secrets left since you have peered right into the core of my soul- I

must ask, any insights into my future- a certain blonde perhaps?'

I shift in my seat a little, preparing to speak when she cuts me right off.

'And I am talking the immediate future, as on Friday night. Will Emmah ever agree to go out with me?'

'Emmah?' My voice cracks as my eyes practically pop out of my head. So much for the poker face, I was bragging about.

Watching as she closes her eyes and shakes her head, those long,

golden dreadlocks contrasting so nicely with her gorgeous dark skin. ‘Anastasia Pappas, aka Emmah,’ she says, unaware of my sigh of relief, thrilled to know it is some other horrible Emmah and not the one I know.

Tuning in to the energy surrounding her name and knowing right away that it is never going to happen at least not in the way that she thinks. ‘You want to know?’ I ask, knowing I could save her a lot of wasted effort by telling her now, but doubt she wants to hear the truth as much as she claims. ‘I mean, wouldn’t you rather just wait and see how it

plays?' I look at her, hoping he will agree.

'Is that what you're going to say to your clients?' She asks, back to business again.

I shake my head, looking right at her. 'Hey, if they're fool enough to ask, then I'm fool enough to tell.' I smile. 'So, the question is, how big of a fool are you?'

She pauses, hesitates for so long that I worry that I took it too far. But then she smiles, her right hand extended as she rises from her seat. 'Fool enough to hire you. Now I know

why you wouldn’t shake hands the first time around.’ She nods, squeezing my hand for a few seconds too long. ‘That’s one of the most amazing readings I’ve ever had.’

‘One of?’ I lift my brow in the mock offense as I reach for my bag and walk alongside her.

She laughs, heading for the door and glancing at me when she says, ‘Why don’t you stop by tomorrow morning, say around ten?’

I pause, knowing there is no way I can do that.

‘What? Do you prefer to sleep in? Join the club.’ She shrugs. ‘But believe me, if I can do it, you can too.’

‘It’s not that.’ I pause, wondering why I am so reluctant to tell her. I mean, now that- I have the job what do I care what she thinks?

She looks at me, waiting, gaze adding up the seconds.

‘It’s just- I have class.’ I shrug, thinking how class sounds so much older than a school like I am in college or something.

She squints, looking me over again. ‘Where?’

‘Um, over at Bay View,’ I mumble, trying not to wince when I say it aloud.

‘The high school?’ Her eyes narrow further, newly informed.

‘Wow, you are psychic.’ I laugh, knowing I sound nervous, stupid, coming clean when I add, ‘I’m finishing my junior year.’

She looks at me for a moment too long a moment- then she turns and opens the door. ‘You seem older,’ she says, the words so abstract I am not sure if they were meant for me or her. ‘Stop by when you can. I’ll show you

how to work the register and a few other things around here.'

'You want me to sell stuff? I thought I was just giving readings?' Surprised to hear my job description expanding so quickly.

'When you are not giving readings, you'll be working on the floor. Is that a problem?'

I shake my head as she holds the door open. 'Just- just one thing.' I bite down on my lip, unsure how to go ahead. 'Well, two things. First- do you mind if I go by a different name- you know, for the readings and stuff? I live

with my aunt, and while she's cool and all, she doesn't exactly know about my abilities, so-'

'Be whoever you want.' She shrugs. 'No worries. But since I need to start booking appointments, who do you want to be?'

I pause, not having thought the through until now. Wondering if I should choose Rachel after my best friend in Oregon, or something even more common like Anne or Jenny or something like that. But knowing how people always expect psychics to be about as far from normal as it gets, I gaze toward the beach and choose the

third thing I see, bypassing Tree and Basketball Court as I say, ‘Avalon.’ Immediately like the sound of it. ‘You know, like the town on Catalina Island?’

She nods, following me outside as she asks, ‘And the second thing?’

I turn, taking a deep breath and hoping she will listen when I say, ‘You can do better than Emmah.’

She looks at me, gaze moving over my face, clearly resigned to the truth if not exactly thrilled to hear it from me.

‘You have a serious history of falling for all the wrong girls.’ I shake my head. ‘You do know that, right?’

I wait for a response, some recognition of what I just said, but she just shrugs and waves me away. Still watching as I head to my car, having no idea I can hear her when she thinks: Do not I know it.

The moment I pull into the drive Jaylynn calls my cell, telling me to just go ahead and order a pizza for dinner since she must work late. And even though I am tempted to tell her about my new job, I do not. I mean, I need to inform her, if for no other

reason than to spare me the one she is lined up, but still, there is no way I can admit to getting the job. she will think it is weird. Even if I omit all the stuff about getting paid to give readings (and believe me, I would never dream of mentioning that) she will still think a job at a metaphysical bookstore is strange. Even silly. Who knows?

Jaylynn's far too reasonable and rational to ever get behind such a thing. Preferring to live in a world that is sturdy and solid, that makes perfect sense, versus the real one that is anything but. And while I hate always having to lie to her, I do not see how I

have much of a choice. There is just no way she can ever learn the truth about me, let alone that I will be giving readings under the code name of Avalynn.

I will just tell her I got a job somewhere local, someplace normal, like a regular bookstore, or a Starbucks. And then, of course, I will have to find a way to back the story up in case she decides to follow up on all that.

I park in the garage and head up the stairs, tossing my bag onto my bed without even looking, then heading for my closet as I yank off my tee.

About to unzip my jeans when Naddalin says, ‘Do not mind me, I’m just sitting here enjoying the view.’ I cover my chest with my arms, my heart beating triple time as Naddalin lets out a low, sweet white and Jasmine at me.

‘I didn’t even see you. I didn’t even sense you for that matter,’ I say, reaching for my tee again.

‘Guess you were too distracted.’ She smiles, patting the space right beside her, face creasing with laughter when I pull on my shirt before joining her.

‘What’re you doing here?’ I ask, not interested in the answer, only glad to be near her again. ‘I figured since Jaylynn’s working late-'

‘How’d you-' But then I shake my head and laugh. Of course, she knows. She can read everyone’s mind, including mine, but only when I want her to. And even though I usually leave my shield down, making my thoughts accessible for her to view, right now I just cannot. I feel like I need to explain, tell my side of the story before she can peek in my head and draw her conclusions.

‘And since you did not come by after school-' She then leans toward me, eyes seeking mine.

‘I wanted to give you some time with the twins.’ I pull a pillow onto my belly and finger the seam. ‘You know, so you could get used to being together and- stuff-' I shrug, meeting her gaze, knowing she is not buying it, not for a second.

‘Oh, we’re quite used to each other.’ She laughs. ‘I assure you of that.’ She shakes her head. ‘It’s been quite a day- terribly busy and remarkably interesting, for lack of a better word. But we missed you.’ She

smiles, eyes grazing over my hair, my face, my lips, like the sweetest lingering kiss. ‘It would’ve been so much better if you’d been there.’

I avert my gaze, doubting any of that is the slightest bit true. Muttering under my breath when I say, ‘I bet.’

She touches my chin, making me face her, face masked with concern when she asks, ‘Hey, what’s the about?’

I press my lips together and look away, scrunching my pillow so tight it threatens to burst, wishing I had not said anything because now I

must explain. ‘I’m just-' I shake my head. ‘I’m just not so sure the twins would agree.’ I shrug. ‘They blame me for everything. And it is not like they do not have a point. I meant-'

But before I can finish, I realize something- Naddalin is touching me.

Like touching me touching me.

For reals.

No glove, no telepathic embrace, simply good old- fashioned skin-on-skin contact- or at least, almost contact.

‘How’d you-' I look at her, her eyes shining with laughter when she

catchers me gaping at her bare, gloveless hand.

‘You like?’ She smiles, grasping my arm and lifting it high, both of us watching as the thin veil of energy, the only thing separating my skin from her, pulsates between us. ‘I’ve been working on it all day. Nothing is going to keep me from you, Ever. Nothing.’ She, nods, her gaze meeting mine.

I look at her, mind racing with possibilities, of all that could mean. Enjoying the almost feel of her skin, separated only by the thinnest shroud of pure, vibrating energy, invisible to everyone but us. And while it does

temper the usual rush of tingle and heart, and while it could never compare to the real thing, I miss her so much- just being with her- I will take what I can get.

I lean into her, watching the veil expand until it stretches from our heads to our toes. Allowing us to lie together in the way that we used to or at least in the way that we used to.

‘Much better.’ I smile, hands roaming her face, her arms, her chest. ‘Not to mention how it’s far less embarrassing than the black leather glove.’

‘Embarrassing?’ She pulls away and looks at me, mock outrage displayed on her face.

‘Come on.’ I laugh. ‘Even you have to admit it was a total fashion faux pas. I thought Jasmine was going to have a seizure every time she saw it,’ I murmur, inhaling her wonderful, warm, musky scent as I bury my face in her neck. ‘So, how would you, do it?’ My lips grazing her skin, longing to taste every inch. ‘How’d you harness the magic of School and bring it back here?’

‘It’s got nothing to do with School,’ she whispers, lips at the curve

of my ear. ‘It’s just the magic of energy. Besides, you should know by now that most everything you can do there, can be done here as well.’

I gaze at her, remembering Ava and all the elaborate gold jewelry and designer clothes she used to manifest there, and how upset she always was when they did not survive the return trip home.

But before, I can even mention it, she says, ‘While it has true that the things manifested there cannot be transferred here, if you understand how the magic works, if you truly get how everything is just made up of energy,

then there’s no reason you can’t manifest the same things here. Like your Lamborghini, for instance.’

‘I’d hardly call it my Lamborghini,’ I say, cheeks flushing even though it was not so long ago when she had a thing for exotic cars too. ‘The second I was done with it I sent it right back. I mean, it’s not like I kept it.’

She smiles, burying her hand in my hair and smoothing the ends between the tips of her fingers. ‘In between manifesting things for the twins, I perfected it.’

‘What kinds of things?’ I ask, moving so I can better see her, at once distracted by the sight of her lips, remembering how warm and silky they once felt on mine, wondering if the new energy shield will allow us to experience that again.

‘It all started with a flat-screen TV.’ Her sighs. ‘Or, should I say flat screens since they ended up needing one for each of their rooms, plus another two for the den that they’ll share. And not long after I got them all hooked up and working, they sat down to watch, and not five minutes in they

were inundated with images of things they couldn't live without.'

I squint, surprised to hear that, since the twins never seemed to care all that much about material things back in School, but that's because material things tend to lose most of their value once you can manifest whatever you want. I guess losing their magic has made them just like anyone else- longing for everything just out of their reach.

'Trust me, they're an advertiser's dream.' She smiles, shaking her head. 'Falling right into

that coveted youth market of thirteen to thirty.'

'Except for the fact that you did not buy any of those things, did you? You just closed your eyes and made them appear. Hardly the same as going to the store and charging it on your credit card. Do you even have a credit card?' Never having seen her even carry a wallet, much less a pile of plastic.

'No need.' She then laughs, finger skimming the bridge of my nose before her lips meet the tip. 'But even though I didn't go out and buy all of those things as you so generously

pointed out...' She smiles. 'That does not make those commercials any less effective, which was my point.'

I pull away, knowing she is expecting me to laugh, or at least say something lighthearted in reply, but I cannot. And even though I hate to disappoint her, I still shake my head and say, 'Either way, you need to be careful.' I shift my body, so my gaze can better meet her.

'You shouldn't spoil them so much, or make them so comfortable they're reluctant to leave.' She squints at me, clearly not following my meaning, so I rush ahead to explain.

‘What I mean is, you need to remember that living with you is a temporary solution. Our main goal is to look after them until we can restore their magic and get them back to school, which is where they belong.’

She rolls onto her back and stares at the ceiling. Turning her face toward mine as she says, ‘About that.’

I hold my breath and look at her, my stomach dipping ever so slightly.

‘I’ve been thinking-' Her squints. ‘Who’s to say School is where they belong?’

I balk, an argument pressing forth from my lips until she raises her finger and stops it right there.

‘Eternally, the question as to whether they return, well, don’t you think that’s something they should decide? I’m not sure we’re the ones who should be making those choices.’

‘But we’re not choosing,’ I say, voice shrill, unsteady. ‘That’s what they want! Or at least that is what they said the night I found them. They were furious with me, blaming me for the loss of their magic, for stranding them here- or at least Rayne was; Neville- well, Neville was just Neville.’ I shrug.

‘But still, are you saying that’s changed?’

She closes her eyes for a moment, before leveling her gaze back on mine. ‘I’m not sure they even know what they want at the point,’ she says. ‘They’re a little overwhelmed, excited by the possibilities of being here, and yet too terrified to even step outside. I just think we should give them some time and space and keep our minds open to the possibility of them staying a little bit longer than planned. Or at least until they are fully adjusted, and better able to decide for themselves. Besides, I owe them, it is the least I can

do. Don’t forget they helped me find you.’

I swallow hard and avert my gaze, torn between wanting what is best for the twins while worried about the impact it will have on Naddalin and me. I mean, they have been here less than a day and I am already mourning my access to her, which is a selfish way to view two people in need. Still, I do not think you have to be psychic to know that with the two of them around, requiring all kinds of assistance, times like the- when it is just Naddalin and me- will be severely limited.

‘Is that the first time you met? In School?’ I ask, seeming to remember Rayne saying something about Naddalin helping them, not the other way around.

Naddalin shakes her head, eyes on mine when she says, ‘No, that was just the first time I’d seen them in a long time. We go way back back to Salem.’

I look at her, jaw dropped, wondering if she was there during the trials, though she is quick to dispel that.

‘It was just before the trouble started, and I was only passing through. They’d gotten into some mischief and couldn’t find their way, home- so I gave them a ride in my carriage, and their aunt was never the wiser.’ She laughs some...

-And-

I’m just about to make some crappy little comment, something about her spoiling and enabling them from the very start, when she says, ‘They’ve suffered an extraordinarily hard life- losing everything they’ve ever known and loved at an incredibly young age-

surely you can relate to that? I know I can.'

I sigh, feeling small, selfish, and embarrassed that I even needed to be reminded of that. Determined to stick to the practical when I say, 'But who's going to raise them?' Hoping it will seem like my concerns are far less about me and more about them. I mean, with all their unmitigated weirdness, not to mention they are bizarre history, where would they go? Who could look after them?

'We're going to look after them.' Naddalin rolls onto her side and makes me face her again. 'You and I.

Together. We're the only ones who can.'

I sigh, wanting to turn away, but drawn to the warmth of her all-encompassing gaze. 'I'm just not sure we're fit to be parents.' I shrug, hand moving over her shoulder, getting lost in her tangle of hair. 'Or role models, or guardians, or whatever. We're too young!' I add, thinking it is a good and valid point, and expecting about any reaction but the laughter I get.

'Too young?' She shakes her head. 'Speak for yourself! I have been around for a while, you know. Long enough to qualify as a suitable

guardian for the twins. Besides.' She smiles. 'How hard can it be?'

I close my eyes and shake my head, remembering my feeble attempts to guide Riley both in human and ghost form, and how I failed miserably. And to be honest, I am just not sure I am up for it again. 'You have no idea what you're getting into,' I tell her. 'You can't even begin to imagine what it's like to guide two headstrong, thirteen-year- old girls. It's like herding cats- completely impossible.'

'Eternally,' she says, voice low, coaxing, determined to ease my concerns and chase all the dark clouds

away. ‘I know what’s bothering you, believe me, I do. But it is just five more years until they turn eighteen and head off on their own, and then we will have the freedom to do whatever we want. What're five years when we have all of eternity?’

But I shake my head again, refusing to be swayed. ‘If they head off on their own,’ I say. ‘If. Believe me, there are plenty of kids who stick around the house long after that.’

‘Yes, but the difference is, you and I won’t let them.’ She then smiles, eyes practically begging me to lighten up and smile too. ‘We’ll teach them all

the magic they'll need to gain their indie pen dance and get by on their own. Then we'll send 'em off and wish 'em well and go somewhere on our own.'

-And-

The way she smiles, the way she gazes into my eyes and smooths my hair off my face makes it impossible to stay mad, impossible to waste any more time on a topic like when my body's so close to her.

'Five years is nothing when you've already lived for six hundred,'

she says, lips at my cheek, my neck, my ear.

I snuggle closer, knowing she is right, even though my perspective's a little different from her. Having never spent more than two decades in any one incarnation makes five years spent babysitting the twins seem like an eternity.

She pulls me to her, arms locked tightly around me, comforting me in a way I wish could last forever. 'Are we good?' She whispers... 'Are we finished with the?'

I nod, pressing my body hard against her, having no need for words. The only thing I want now, the only thing that will make me feel better is the reassuring feel of her lips.

I shift my body so it is covering her, conforming to the bend of her chest, the valley of her torso, the bulk near her hips. Hearts beating in perfect cadence, vaguely aware of the slim veil of energy pulsating between us as I lower my mouth to her- pressing, pushing, and kneading together- weeks of longing rising to the surface- until all I want to do is infuse my body with her.

She moans, a low primal sound coming from deep within, hands clutched at my waist, bringing me closer ’til there is nothing between us but two sets of clothes that need to be shed.

I fumble at her fly as she pulls at my tee, breath meeting in short, ragged gasps as our fingers hurry as fast as they can, unable to complete their tasks quickly enough to satisfy our need.

-And-

Just as I have unbuttoned her jeans and start to slide them down, I

realize we have gotten so close, the energy veil was pushed out.

‘Naddalin!’ I gasp, watching as she leaps from the bed, breath coming so heavy and fast, her words are clipped at the end.

‘Eternally - I’m-' She shakes her head. ‘I’m sorry I thought it was safe- I didn’t realize’

I reach for my tee and cover myself, cheeks flushed, insides aflame, knowing she is right, we cannot take the risk- cannot afford to get caught up like that.

‘I’m sorry too- I think- I think maybe I pushed it away and-' I bow my head, allowing my hair to fall into my face, feeling small and examined, sure I am to blame.

The mattress dips as she returns to my side, the veil fully restored as she lifts my chin and makes me face her again. ‘It’s not your fault- I- I lost focus- I was so caught up in you I couldn’t maintain it.’

‘It’s okay. Really,’ I say.

‘No, it’s not; I’m older than you- I should have more control-' She shakes her head and stares at the wall,

jaw clenched, gaze far away, eyes suddenly narrowing as she turns back to me and says, ‘eternally- how do we know if she is even real?’

I squint, having no idea what she means.

‘What kind of proof do we have? How do we know Naddalin’s not just playing us, having a bit of fun at our expense?’

I take a deep breath and shrug, realizing I have no proof at all. My eyes meeting her as I replay the scene from that day, all the way to the end where I add my blood to the mix and make

Naddalin drink, realizing the only proof I have is Naddalin's extremely unreliable word.

'Who's to say she is even legit?' Her eyes widen as an idea begins to form. 'Naddalin's a liar- we've no reason to trust her.'

'Yeah, but it's not like we can test it. I mean, what if it is not a big game, what if it is legit? We can't take the risk, can we?'

Naddalin smiles, rising from the bed and heading for my desk where she closes her eyes and manifests a tall white candle in an elaborate gold

holder, a sharp silver dagger, its blade pointy and smooth, its handle encrusted with crystals and gems, and a gold-framed mirror her sets down beside them, motioning for me to join her as she says, ‘Normally I would say ladies first- but in the case-'

She holds her hand over the glass and raises the knife, placing the edge to her palm and tracing the curve of her lifeline, watching her blood flow onto the mirror, pooling, coagulating, before closing her eyes and setting the candle aflame. The wound already healed by the time she passes the blade through the blaze, cleansing, purifying,

before handing it to me and urging me to do the same.

I lean toward her, inhaling deeply as I quickly slice through my flesh. At first wincing at the sharp stab of pain, then watching fascinated, as the blood pours from my palm and onto the mirror where it slowly creeps toward her.

We stand together, bodies still, breath halted, watching as two ruby red splotches meet, mingle, a coalesce- the perfect embodiment of our genetic makeup joining as one- the very thing Naddalin warned us against.

Waiting for something to happen, some catastrophic punishment for what we've both done- but getting nothing- no reaction at all.

'Well, I'll be damned-' Naddalin says, eyes meeting mine. 'It's fine! Perfectly-'

Her words cut short by the sudden spark and sizzle as our blood begins to boil, conducting so much heart a huge plume of smoke bursts from the mirror and fills up the air- crackling and spitting until the blood evaporates completely. Leaving behind only the sheerest layer of dust on a burnt-out mirror.

Exactly what will happen to Naddalin if our DNA should meet.

We gape, speechless, unsure what to say. But words are no longer necessary, the meaning is clear.

Naddalin's not playing. Her warning was real.

Naddalin and I can never be together.

Unless I pay her price.

'Well…' Naddalin nods, struggling to appear calm though her face is stricken. 'Guess Naddalin's not nearly the liar I accused her of being at least not in the case.'

‘Which also means she has the antidote- and all I have to do now is-'

But I cannot even finish before Naddalin’s cutting me off. ‘Ever, please, don’t even go there. Just do me a favor and stay away from Naddalin. She is dangerous and unstable, and I do not want you anywhere near her, okay? Just-' She shakes her head, and runs her hand through her hair, not wanting me to see how distraught she is and heading for the door as she says, ‘Just give me some time to figure things out. I’ll think of a way.’

She looks at me, so shaken by the events she is determined to keep

her distance. Manifesting a single red tulip into my newly herald palm in place of a kiss, before heading down the stairs and out my front door.

The next day, when I get home from school, Haven is on my front steps, eyes smeared with mascara, royal blue bangs hanging limply in her face, with a blanketed bundle clutched tight in her arms.

‘I know I should’ve called.’ She scrambles to her feet; the face is red and swollen as she sniffs back the tears. ‘I guess I didn’t know what to do, so I came here.’ She rearranges the blanket, showing me a solid black cat

with amazing green eyes that appears very weak.

‘Is she yours?’ I glance at them, noticing how both of their auras are ragged and frayed.

‘She-' Haven nods, fussing with the blanket and raising it back to her chest.

‘I didn’t know you had a cat.’ I squint, wanting to help but unsure what to do. My dad was allergic, so we always had dogs. ‘Is the why you weren’t at school today?’

She nods, following me into the kitchen where I grab a bottle of water and pour it into a bowl.

‘How long have you had her?’ I ask, watching as she places the cat in her lap and brings the bowl to her face. But the cat’s not the least bit interested and quickly turns away.

‘A few months.’ She shrugs, giving up on the water and smoothing the top of her head. ‘Nobody knows. Well, outside of Josh, Austin, and the house cleaner who is sworn to secrecy, but nobody else. My mom would flip. God forbid a real living thing to mess up her designer decorating scheme.’

She shakes her head. ‘She lives in my room, mostly under the bed. But I leave the window cracked so she can get out and wander around now and then. I mean, I know they are supposed to live longer if you keep ’em inside, but what kind of life is that?’ She looks at me, her normally bright sunshiny aura turned gray with worry.

‘What’s her name?’ I peer at the cat, keeping my voice to a whisper, trying to hide my concern. From what I can see, she is not long for the world.

‘Charm…’ The corners of her lips lifting ever so slightly as she glances at us. ‘I named her that

because she’s lucky- or at least it seemed that way at the time. I found her just outside my window the first time Josh and I kissed. It seemed so Dadaistic.’ She shrugs. ‘Like a good sign. But now-' She shakes her head and looks away.

‘Maybe I can help,’ I say, an idea beginning to form. One I am not sure will work, but still, from what I can see I have nothing to lose.

‘She’s not exactly a kitten. She is an old lady now. The vet told me to keep her comfortable for as long as I can. And I totally would have kept her home since she likes it under my bed,

but my mom's decision to redo all the bedrooms even though my dad’s threatening to sell, and now the decorator is there, along with a Realtor, and everyone is fighting and the house is a mess.

And since Josh is auditioning for the new band, and since Jasmine is getting ready for her performance tonight, I thought I’d come here.’ She looks at me.

‘Not that you were last choice or anything.’ She cringes, realizing what she just said. ‘It’s just that you’re always so busy with Naddalin and I didn’t want to bother you. But if you

are busy, I do not have to stay. I mean, if she’s coming over or something, I can just-'

‘Trust me.’ I lean against the counter and shake my head. ‘Naddalin’s-' I stare at the wall, wondering just how to phrase it. ‘Naddalin’s pretty busy these days. So, I doubt she'll be quickly visiting anytime soon.’

I glance at her and Charm, reading her aura and knowing she is even more distraught than she seems. And even though I know it is not right, ethical, or whatever, even though I know it is the circle of life and you are

not supposed to interfere, I cannot stand to see my friend suffer like them, not when I have a half bottle of elixir sitting inside my bag.

'I'm just sad.' She sighs, scratching just under Charm's chin. 'I mean she's lived a good long life and all, but still. Why does it have to be so sad when it ends?'

I shrug, barely listening, mind buzzing with the promise of a new idea.

'It's so weird how like one minute everything's fine- or maybe even not so fine- but still, you're at least here. And then the next- gone.

Like Evangeline. Never to be seen or heard from again.'

I drum my fingers against the granite counter, knowing that is not exactly true, but unwilling to refute it.

'I guess I just don't get the point. It's like, why should you bother getting attached to anything if, A: It's never- ever going to last, and B: It hurts like hell when it's over?' She shakes her head. 'Because if everything's finite, if everything has a definite beginning, middle, and end, then why even get started in the first place? What's the point when everything just leads to The End?'

She blows her bangs out of her eyes and looks at me. ‘And I don’t mean death-like-’ She nods toward her cat. ‘Although that’s where we all end up no matter how hard we fight.’

I glance at her and Charm, nodding as though I am right there. Like I am just like everyone else. Waiting for my turn in a long morbid line.

‘I mean death more metaphorically. In a nothing lasts forever way, you know? Because it is true, nothing is built to last. Nothing. Nothing- thing.’

‘But Haven-' I start, stopping the second she shoots me a look meant to silence.

‘Listen, before you try to sell me all that bright side nonsense you’re just dying to spout, name one thing that doesn’t end.’ She narrows her gaze in a way that sets me on edge, making me wonder if she knows about me if she is trying to bait me somehow. But when I take a deep breath and look at her again, it iss clear she is battling her own set of demons, not me.

‘Can’t do it, right?’ She shakes her head. ‘Unless you were going to say God, or universal love, or whatever, but

that is not what I am talking about, anyway. I mean, Charm is dying, my parents are on the verge of divorcing, and, let us face it, Josh and I are going to end eventually too. And if it is purely an inevitable fact, then-' She shakes her head and wipes her nose. ‘Well- I may as well take control of the situation and be the one who decides when.

Hurt her, before she can hurt me. Because two things are for sure, A: It is going to end, and B: Someone is bound to get hurt. And why should that someone be me?’ She looks away, nose runny, lips twisted. ‘Mark my words, from the point on, I’m Skaufyceol Girl.

Everything runs right off me, nothing can stick.'

I look at her, sensing the is not the whole story, but willing to take her at her word. 'You know what? You are right. You're right,' I say, seeing her look up in surprise. 'Everything is finite.' Everything but Naddalin, Naddalin, and me! 'And you are also right that you and Josh will end at some point, and not just because everything ends as you said, but because that's just the way it goes. Most high school relationships don't make it past graduation.'

‘Is that how you see you and Naddalin?’ She picks at Charm’s blanket while looking at me. ‘That you guys won’t make it past grad night?’

I press my lips together and avert my gaze, knowing I am the world’s worst liar when I say, ‘I- I try not to think about it too much. But what I meant was, just because something ends does not mean it is a sad thing or that someone is bound to get hurt, or that it should have never happened in the first place, or whatever. Because if each step brings us to the next, then how will we ever get anywhere, how can we ever grow if

we avoid everything that might hurt us?'

She looks at me, nodding only slightly, as though she sees my point but will not fully concede.

'So-o, we have no choice but to continue, to just get out there and hope for the best. And who knows, we might even learn a thing or two along the way.' I look at her, knowing I haven't completely sold it, so I add, 'I guess what I'm trying to say is, you can't run away just because something won't last. You must hang in there, let it play out. It's the only way you'll ever advance.' I shrug, wishing I could be a

little more eloquent, but there it is. ‘Think about it, if you didn’t rescue your cat, if you didn’t say yes when Josh asked you out- well, there’s a lot of wonderful moments you would’ve missed.’

She looks at me, still wanting to argue, but not saying a word.

‘Josh is a really sweet guy, and she’s crazy about you. I do not think you should throw her overboard so soon. Besides,’ I say, knowing she hears me but is not truly listening, ‘you shouldn’t make those kinds of decisions when you’re feeling so stressed.’

‘How about moving, then? Is that a good enough reason?’

‘Josh is moving?’ I squint. I had not seen that coming.

She shakes her head, scratching Charm on the spot between her ears when she says, ‘Not Josh; Me. My dad keeps talking about selling the house, but damn if she’ll discuss it with Austin or me.’

I look at her, tempted to peer inside her head and see for myself, but sticking to my earlier vow to allow my friends their privacy.

‘All I know for sure is that the phrase resale value comes up all the time.’ She shakes her head, looking at me when she says, ‘But you know what the means if any of them is true? It means I will not be going to Bay View next year. I will not get to graduate with my class. I won’t be going to any Orange County high school for that matter.’

‘I won’t let them happen,’ I say, gaze locked on her. ‘There’s no way you’re leaving. You have to graduate with us-'

‘Well, that’s genuinely nice and all.’ She shrugs. ‘But I’m not sure you

can stop it. It's a little out of your league, don't you think?'

I glance at her and her cat, knowing it is not at all out of my league. Finding an antidote for Naddalin? Maybe. Helping my best friend stay in her zip code and save her cat? Not so much. There is plenty I can do. Plenty. But still, I just look at her and say, 'We'll work something out. Just trust me, okay? Maybe you can move in here with me and Jaylynn?' Nodding as though I mean it, even though Jaylynn would never have it. But still needing to put something out

there, provide comfort since it is not like I can voice what I am hoping to do.

'You'd do that?' She squints- 'Really?'

'Of course.' I shrug. 'Whatever it takes.'

She swallows hard and gazes around, shaking her head when she says, 'You know I'd never take you up on it, but still, it's nice to know that even with all our rough spots you're still my best friend.'

I squint, having always assumed it was Malcolm, not me.

‘Well, you and Malcolm.’ She laughs. ‘I mean, I can have two best friends- an heir and a spare, as they say?’ She wipes her nose again, shaking her head when she adds, ‘I bet I look like crap, right? Go ahead, tell me, I can take it.’

‘You don’t look like crap,’ I say, wondering why she is suddenly focused on her looks. ‘You look sad. There is a difference. Besides, does it matter?’

‘It does if you’re considering whether or not you should hire me.’ She shrugs. ‘I’ve got a job interview, but there’s no way I can go looking like

the. And it’s not like I can bring Charm.’

I gaze at her cat, watching the life- force energy slowly slipping away, knowing I must move fast before it is too late. ‘I’ll keep her. It’s not like I’m going anywhere anyway.’

She looks at me, wavering on whether she should leave her poor dead cat in my care. But I just nod, coming around to her side of the counter and lifting Charm out of her arms as I add, ‘Seriously. Just do what you need to do, and I’ll babysit.’ I smile, urging her to agree.

She hesitates, glancing between me and Charm, then rummages through her oversized bag for a small, handheld mirror, before wetting her finger and clearing the mascara tracks from her cheeks.

'I shouldn't belong.' She grabs a black pencil and draws a thick, smudgy line around each eye. 'Maybe for an hour? Two at the most?' She looks at me, trading the pencil for blush. 'All you have to do is hold her and give her some water if she wants. But she will not. She doesn't want much of anything now.' She coats her lips with a swipe of gloss and

rearranges her bangs, before slinging her bag over her shoulder and heading for the door. Climbing into her car as she turns to me and says, ‘Thanks. I need the job more than you think. I need to start saving some money so I can emancipate myself like Naddalin. I’m tired of the crap.’

I look at her, unsure of what to say. Naddalin’s situation is unique. Not at all what it seems.

‘And yes, I know, I will not be able to support myself in quite the same style as Naddalin, but still, I’d rather live in some crappy studio somewhere than be subject to my

parents' impulsive decisions and whirs. Anyway, you sure you're okay with them?'

I nod, hugging Charm tighter, mentally urging her to hold on, just a little bit longer, until I can help.

Haven slides her key into the ignition, the engine turning as she says, 'I promised Naddalin I wouldn't be late. And if I hurry, I might be on time.' Checking her appearance in the rearview mirror as she shifts in reverse.

‘Naddalin?’ I freeze my expression one of pure panic but unable to change it.

She shrugs, backing out of my drive as she calls, ‘She’s the one who scored me the interview.’ Waving as she disappears down the street, leaving me with a dead cat in my arms, and no words to warn her.

‘You can’t do it,’ she says, barely having opened the door before she is already shaking her head.

‘You don’t even know what I’m here for.’ I frown, hugging Charm

tightly to my chest, wishing I had not come here.

‘The cat is dying, and you want to know if it’s okay to save it and I’m telling you it’s not. You can’t do it.’ She shrugs, reading the situation more than my mind, which I purposely blocked so she cannot view my visit to Naddalin, which would set her on edge.

‘Do you mean can’t as in not possible? Like the elixir will not work on a feline? Or cannot as in the moral sense, as in do not play God, always?’

‘Does it matter?’ She lifts her brow, stepping to the side and allowing me in.

‘Of course, it matters,’ I whisper, TV noise drifting down from upstairs, the twins’ daily dose of reality shows.

She heads into the den, plopping onto the couch and patting the space right beside her. And even though I am annoyed she is acting, not even giving me a chance to explain, I still join her, rearranging the blanket, hoping one look at Charm will convince her.

‘I just don’t think you should jump to conclusions,’ I say, shifting my body so I am facing her. ‘It’s not as simple as you think. It’s not black or white, it’s mostly all gray.’

She leans toward me, gazes softening as she moves her thumb back and forth under Charm’s chin. ‘I’m sorry, Ever. Really.’ She gazes at me before pulling away. ‘But even if the elixir did work- which I’m not sure it would since I’ve never tried it on an animal before, but even if it did-'

‘Really?’ I look at her, surprised to hear that. ‘You’ve never had a pet you couldn’t bear to part

with?' My eyes graze over her, taking her in.

'Not one that- I couldn't bear to lose, no.' She shakes her head.

I narrow my eyes, not sure how I feel about that.

'Always, back in my day, we didn't keep pets in quite the same way. And after I drank the elixir, I wasn't interested in owning anything that might tie me down.'

I nod, catching the way she gazes at Charm and hoping there's room to negotiate. 'Fine. No pets. I get it,' I say. 'But do you get how someone

might become so attached to their kitty they can't bear to say goodbye?'

'Are you asking if I know about attachment?' She looks at me, gazes heavy, steady, fixed right on mine. 'About love, and the unbearable grief that comes when it's lost?

I gaze down at my lap, feeling juvenile, foolish. I should have seen that coming.

'There's much more at stake than just saving a cat or granting eternal life- if there even is such a thing in the animal kingdom. The real question is, how will you explain it to

Haven? What will you tell her when she returns only to find the dead cat, she left in your care is now miraculously cured- even becoming a kitten again, who knows? How will you possibly explain that to her?'

I sigh, not having thought about that. Had not considered that if it does work, Charm will not just be heralded, but physically transformed.

'It's not about it not working- I've no clue about that. And it iss not about your right to play God- you and I both know I am the last one who should judge such a thing. It is more about safeguarding our secrets. And while I

know you have only the best intentions at heart, in the end, helping your friend will only ignite her suspicion. Raising questions that can never be answered simply or logically without revealing too much. Besides, Haven is already onto us, or something at least. So now, more than ever, it's important for us to lay low.'

I press my lips together, swallowing past the lump in my throat, hating that I have so many amazing tools at my disposal, all these magical abilities, but unable to use them, to help those whom I love.

‘I’m sorry,’ she says, hand hovering over my arm, hesitating to make contact until the veil comes along. ‘But as sad as it seems, it is just the natural course of events. And believe me, animals accept these things far better than people do.’

I lean into her shoulder, into her touch, amazed by her power to comfort me no matter how sad things get. ‘I just feel so bad for her- her parents are always fighting- she might have to move- it’s making her question the point of everything. Kind of like I did when my world fell apart.’

‘Always -' She starts, gazes soft, lips looming so close I cannot help but press mine against them- the moment cut short when the twins squeal their way down the stairs.

‘Naddalin- Neville won’t let me-' Rayne stops, standing before us, dark eyes wider than usual when she says, ‘Omigod is that a cat?’

I glance at Naddalin. Since when does Rayne use words like- ‘Omigod’ - ‘An exclamation of surprise, pleasure, dismay?’

But she just shakes her head and laughs. ‘Don’t get too close.’ She

glances between them. ‘And keep your voice down. This is an extremely sick cat. I’m afraid she doesn’t have exceptionally long.’

‘Then why don’t you save it?’ Rayne asks, prompting Neville to nod in agreement, the three of us gazing at Naddalin, our eyes wide and pleading.

‘Because we do not do things like that,’ she says, voice stern and parental. ‘That’s not how it’s done.’

‘But you saved Ever, and she’s not nearly as cute,’ Rayne says, kneeling before me ’til her face is level with Charms.

‘Rayne-' Naddalin starts.

But she just laughs, glancing between us when she says, ‘Just joking. You know I’m joking, right?’

I look at her, knowing she is not, but not willing to press it. About to get up, wanting to get Charmed back before Haven returns when Neville kneels beside me and places her hand on Charm’s head, closing her eyes as she chants a series of indecipherable words.

‘No magic,’ Naddalin scolds. ‘Not in the case.’

But Neville just sighs and sits back on her heels. ‘It’s not like it works anyway,’ she says, still gazing at Charm. ‘She looks just like Jinx at that age, doesn’t she?’

‘Which time?’ Rayne giggles, nudging her sister as they both start to laugh.

‘We may have extended her life a few times,’ Neville says, cheeks pink as she glances at us, prompting me to look at Naddalin and think: See?

But she just shakes her head. Again- Haven?

‘Can we get a cat?’ Neville asks. ‘A black kitty like the?’ Tugging on her sleeve while gazing at her in a way that is hard to resist. ‘They’re wonderful companions and particularly good around the house. What do you say? Can we? Please?’

‘It’ll help us get our magic back,’ Rayne adds, nodding at her.

I look at Naddalin, reading her expression, and knowing it is as good as done. Whatever the twins want, the twins get. It is as simple as that.

‘We’ll discuss it later,’ Naddalin says, trying a stern look, but

the gesture's empty, everyone knows it but her.

I get up from the couch and head for the door, needing to get Charmed back to the house before Haven returns.

'Are you upset with me?' Naddalin grasps my hand and leads me to my car.

I shake my head and smile. It is impossible to be mad at her, or at least not for exceptionally long. 'I'm not going to lie; I was hoping you'd be on my side.' I shrug, coaxing Charm into her carrier, before leaning against the

door and pulling her close. ‘But it’s not like I don’t get your point. I just wanted to help Haven, that’s all.’

‘Just be there for her.’ She nods, dark gaze on mine. ‘That’s all she wants from you anyway.’

She leans in to kiss me, gathering me into her arms, her hands moving over me and warming me to my core. Pulling away to gaze at me with those deep soulful eyes, the rock to my feather, my eternal partner, whose intentions are so solid and good- I can only hope she never learns of my betrayal, reneging on my promise not

to visit Naddalin just after saying I would not.

She then cups my face between the palms of her hands and peers into my eyes. Sensing my mood shifts so easily it is as though they are here.

I avert my gaze, thinking about Haven, Naddalin, the cat, and all the mounting mistakes- I cannot seem to stop making. Then clearing the thoughts and shaking my head, unwilling to visit that place when I say, ‘See you tomorrow?’ Barely finishing the words before she leans in to kiss me again, a slip of energy pulsating between her lips and mine.

Holding the moment for as long as we can, neither of us willing to break away, until a twin chorus of, ‘Ew! Gross! Do we have to watch that?’ trails from the window upstairs.

‘Tomorrow-’ Naddalin smiles, seeing me safely into my car before heading inside.

Everything started fine. As fine and normal as any other day. I woke up, showered, dressed, stopped by the kitchen to toss some cereal down the sink before chasing it with some OJ I had swished in a glass- my usual morning routine so Jaylynn will think I ate the breakfast she made.

Nodding and smiling the whole way to school as Jasmine complains on and on about Holt, or France, or Holt and France, as I sit there beside her, stopping, turning, speeding, slowing, chasing yellow lights, waiting for the moment when I can see Naddalin again. Knowing the mere sight of her will turn all darkness to light, even if the effect is just temporary.

But the moment- I pull into the lot the first thing I see is a mammoth-sized SUV parked right next to the space Naddalin's saving for me. And I mean mammoth, as in big and ugly. And something about the sight of

Naddalin leaning against that whale of a car fills me with dread.

‘What the hell?’ Jasmine gapes. ‘You give up riding the bus, so you can drive a bus instead?’

I climb out of my Miata, glancing between Big Ugly and Naddalin, hardly believing my ears when she starts quoting a slew of statistics about its superb safety rating and roomy back seats. I mean, I do not remember her ever once caring about the safety rating when she was chauffeuring me.

That is because- you are immortal, she thinks, sensing my thoughts as we head for the gate. But may I remind you, the twins are not, and since they are now in my care, it is my job to keep them from harm.

I shake my head, gaze narrowed as I try to think of a snappy reply. My thoughts are interrupted by Haven who says, 'You're doing it again.' She crosses her arms and glances at us. 'You know, your whole, weird, pseudo telepathy thing.'

'Who even cares about that?' Jasmine screeches. 'Naddalin's driving a bus!' She hooks her thumb over her

shoulder, jabbing toward the big, black monstrosity and wincing at the sight of it.

'Is it a bus or a mom car?' Haven squints, shielding her eyes from the sun. Glancing at each of us. 'Whatever it is, one thing's for sure, it's tragically middle-aged.'

Jasmine nods fully warmed up to the subject now. 'First the glove and now the?' She frowns at Naddalin, disappointment clouding her face. 'I have no idea what you're up to, but man, you are seriously losing your edge. You're not even close to the rock

star you were when you first came to the school.'

I glance at her, eyes narrowed in silent agreement. But Naddalin just laughs, too concerned with the proper care and feeding of the twins to bother with what anyone thinks- including me. And while that is the way a good, responsible, parental- type figure should think, something about it bugs me.

Jasmine and Haven continue, teasing Naddalin about her new, surprisingly stodgy ways, as I tag along, a sliver of energy pulsating between us as she grabs my hand and

thinks, what is going on? Why are you acting like the? Is the because of the cat? I thought you understood all of that?

I stare straight ahead, focused on Jasmine and Haven, sighing loudly as I mentally reply: It is not the cat. We settled that yesterday. She is back at Haven's, marking her days. It is just well, it is like, here I am, making myself crazy, trying to find a solution so we can be together, and all you seem to care about is manifesting HDTV's and the world's ugliest babyproof car so you can cart the twins around town! I shake my head, knowing I need to stop before

I go any further and have something to regret.

‘Everything’s changing,’ I say, not realizing I said it aloud until the words ring in my ears. ‘And I am sorry if I am acting like a brat, but I’m just so frustrated that we can’t be together in the way that we want. And I miss you. I miss you so bad I can’t stand it.’ I pause, eyes stinging, throat hot and tight, threatening to close completely. ‘And now that the twins are living with you, and with my new job starting and all, well, it is like, we are suddenly thrust into the super stressful, middle-

aged life. And trust me, seeing your new car just now didn't help.'

I peer at her, thinking there is no way I am riding in that thing. Instantly ashamed when I see her looking at me with such love and compassion, I cannot help but fold. 'I was hoping the summer would be great, you know? I was hoping we could have some fun- just the two of us.

But now it is not looking so good. And, just to top things off, did I even mention that Jaylynn is dating Milley? My history teacher? Friday night, dinner at eight!' I scowl, hardly believing the pathetic life belongs to a

powerful, newly immortal, seventeen-year- old girl.

‘You got a job?’ She stops in place as her eyes search mine.

‘Out of everything I just said that’s what you’re focusing on?’ I shake my head and pull her along, laughing despite myself.

But she just looks at me, gazes fixed on mine as she says, ‘Where?’

‘Mystics and Moonbeams.’ I shrug, watching Jasmine and Haven wave as they turn down the hall and head for class.

‘Doing what?’ She asks, not ready to drop it just yet.

‘Retail stuff, mainly.’ I gaze at her. ‘You know, working the register, restocking shelves, giving readings, stuff like that.’ I shrug, hoping she will not pay much notice to that last part.

Psychic readings? She gapes, stopping just shy of our classroom.

I nod, staring longingly at my classmate’s spill through the door, preferring to join them than having to finish what I started.

‘Do you think that’s smart? Drawing that kind of attention to

yourself?' Back to talking again now that we are alone in the hall.

'Probably not.' I shrug, knowing it is most definitely not. 'But Jaylynn insists the discipline and stability will do me some good. Or so she says. She just wants to watch me. And short of installing a babysitter cam, the is the easiest, least invasive way. She even had the horrible, soul-sucking, nine- to- five gigs all set up and ready to go, so when Naddalin said she needed some help around the store, well, I didn't have much choice but to what?' I pause, seeing the look on her face, eyes guarded, hard to read.

‘Naddalin?’ Her eyes narrowing to where I can just barely see them. ‘I thought you said someone named Lina owned the store.’

‘Lina does own the store. Naddalin’s her grandson,’ I say, only that’s not entirely true. ‘Well, she’s not her real grandson, it’s more like, she looks after her. Helped raise her after she runs away from her last foster home- or- whatever.’ I shake my head. The last thing I wanted was to start a conversation about Naddalin, especially with the way Naddalin’s gone high alert. ‘I thought it might help, you know, allow unlimited access to books

and things that might help us. Besides, it is not like I am working there under my real name. I'm using an alias.'

'Let me guess.' She peers into my eyes, seeing the answer displayed in my thoughts. 'Avalynn. Cute…' She smiles, but only briefly before she has gone seriously again. 'But you know how it works, right? It is not like a confessional where you are shielded by a screen. People expect face-to-face contact. They want to see you know whether they can trust you. So, what exactly are you planning to do when someone you know just happens to walk in for an impromptu tarot card

reading? Did you even think about that?'

I frown, wondering why she must take what I thought was a good deal and turn it into a problem. And I am about to deliver some snappy reply, say something like- Hello? I am a psychic. I will know before they even get through the door! when Naddalin appears.

Naddalin and- someone else- someone vaguely familiar- someone named Marco who was last seen in a vintage Jaguar, pulling up to her house.

Walking side by side, legs moving swiftly, eyes focused on mine. Naddalin's gaze taunting, mocking, the proud owner of my dirty little secret.

Naddalin moves to shield me, gaze on Naddalin as she thinks: Stay calm. Do not do a thing. I will handle them.

I peer over her shoulder, watching as Naddalin and Marco barrel toward us like an oncoming train. Gazing at me with eyes so deep, so blue, everything blurs but her moist grinning lips and flashing Ouroboros tattoo. And the last thing I think, before I am sucked in completely, is that the is

my fault. If I had kept my promise to Naddalin and stayed away from her, I would not be facing the now.

Her energy swirls toward me, tugging, pulling, luring me in, sucking me into a spiral of darkness, bombarding me with images of Naddalin- the tainted antidote- my ill-advised visit- Haven- Malcolm- France- the twins- all of it coming so quickly I can barely distinguish between them. But the individual images themselves are not important- it is the whole she wants me to see. All of it meant to illustrate one single thing: Naddalin's

in charge now- the rest of us are just puppets, pulled by her strings.

‘Morning,’ mates!’ She sings, releasing me from her grip as my body falls limp against Naddalin’s.

But despite her sweet murmurings as she ushers me away from Naddalin and into the room, despite the soft reassurances intended to soothe, convinced that we have just dodged a bullet and it is over, for now, I happen to know it is only begun.

More is coming.

There is no doubt.

Naddalin's next shot is aimed solely at me.

After lunch, I head for Mystics and Moonbeams. Eager to start my on-the-job training, hoping it will provide a nice distraction from the mess otherwise known as my life.

It was bad enough when Naddalin kept disappearing between classes so she could check in on the twins, but by lunch, when I assured her I was fine, that Naddalin would not bother me, and that she should just stay home, I headed for our table only to learn that Haven has boarded the Naddalin train. Picking apart a vanilla-

frosted cupcake while gushing about the big part she played in securing her the job at the vintage store, despite her arriving at the interview ten minutes late.

And all I could do was mumble an occasional word of dissent, which did not go over so well. So, after her third excruciatingly dramatic eye roll, after telling me to relax and unclench for the umpteenth time, I tossed my uneaten sandwich and made for the gate. Vowing to keep an eye on her, do whatever it takes to keep them from getting together. Just one more item on my growing to-do list.

I pull into the alley, parking in one of two spaces behind the store before heading toward the front, half expecting to find the door locked, figuring Naddalin could not resist the call of killer waves on such a beautiful day and surprised to find it wide open, with Naddalin behind the register, ringing a sale.

‘Oh hey, here’s Avalynn now.’ She nods. ‘I was just telling Susan about our new psychic reader, and you walk in on cue.’

Susan turns, looking me over, scrutinizing, accessing, adding up all the parts in her head. Sure, she is aced

the equation when she says, ‘Aren’t you a little young to be giving readings?’ She gives me a smug look.

I smile, an awkward slanting of lips, as my gaze darts between them, unsure how to respond, especially with the way Naddalin’s looking at me.

‘Being psychic is a gift,’ I mumble, nearly choking on the word. Remembering a time, not long ago, when I scoffed at the thought, sure it was anything but. ‘It’s got nothing to do with age,’ I add, watching her aura flicker and flare, knowing I have failed to convince her. ‘You either have it, or

you don’t.’ I shrug, digging myself a very deep hole.

‘So, should I book you reading?’ Naddalin asks, smiling in a way that is hard to resist. But not for Susan; shaking her head and clutching her bag, she heads for the door, saying, ‘You just give me a call when Ava comes back.’

The bell clangs loudly as the door closes behind her. ‘Well, that went well.’ I shrug, turning toward Naddalin and watching her file the receipt before adding, ‘Is my age going to be a problem here?’

‘You sixteen?’ She asks, barely glancing at me.

I press my lips together and nod.

‘Then you’re old enough to work here. Susan’s a psychic junkie, shear won’t resist for long. she’ll be on your sign- up sheet before you know it.’

‘Psychic junkie? Is that anything like a groupie?’ I follow her to the office in the back, noticing she is wearing the same trunks and peace-sign tee as before.

‘Can’t make a move without consulting the cards, the stars, what

have you.’ She nods some. ‘Though I’m guessing you gathered your share of regulars during all the readings you’ve given.’ She glances over her shoulder as she opens the door, eyes narrowed, knowing, in a way I cannot miss.

‘About that-' I start, figuring I may as well confess since she is on to me anyway.

But she just turns, hand raised, decided to stop me when she says, ‘Please, no confessionals.’ Smiling and shaking her head. ‘If I have any hope of enjoying those huge swells out there, then I don’t have the luxury of regretting my decision. Though you

might want to rethink that bit about it being a gift.'

I look at her, surprised to hear her say that since all the psychics I have met, which, okay, consists of just Ava, but still, most of them think it is most certainly something you are born with.

'I'm thinking of adding some classes to the schedule, psychic development stuff, maybe even throw in some Wicca as well, and trust me, we'll get a lot more sign-ups if everyone thinks they have a fair shot.'

‘But do they?’ I ask, watching as she heads for an extremely messy desk and riffles through a pile of papers near the edge.

‘Sure-’ She nods, picking up a sheet, looking it over, then shaking her head as she swaps it for another. ‘Everyone has the potential, it’s just a matter of developing it. With some it comes easy, they could not ignore it if they tried, with others- they must dig a little deeper to find it. And you? When did you know?’

She looks at me, those sea-green eyes meeting mine in a way that makes my stomach dance. I mean, one

minute he is talking abstractedly, thumbing through papers as though she is barely minding her words, then the next everything stops, her gaze is on mine, and it is like time has stood still.

I swallow hard, unsure what to say, part of me longing to confess, knowing she is one of the few who would understand, but the other part resists- Naddalin's the only one who knows my story, and I feel like- I should keep it that way.

'Just born with it, I guess.' I lift my shoulders, cringing at the way my voice rose at the end. My eyes dart

around the room, hoping to avoid the topic as well as her gaze when I add, ‘So- classes; who are teaching those?’

She shrugs, tilting her head in a way that allows her dreadlocks to fall into her face. ‘Guess I will,’ she says, pushing them back and revealing the scar on her brow. ‘It’s something I’ve been wanting to do for a while anyway, but Lina’s always been against it. I figure I may as well take advantage of her not being there to see if it works.’

‘Why’s she against it?’ I ask, stomach-settling when she leans back and props her feet on her desk.

‘She likes to keep it simple- books, music, angel figurines, with the occasional reading thrown in. Safe. Benign. Mainstream mysticism where no one gets hurt.’

‘And your way? People get hurt?’ I study her, trying to pinpoint just what it is about her that sets me on edge.

‘Not at all. My goal is to empower people, help them live better, more fulfilled lives, by accessing their intuition, that’s all.’ She glances at me, green eyes catching me staring, making my stomach go weird again.

‘And Lina doesn’t want to empower people?’ I ask, feeling all fluttery under her gaze.

‘With knowledge comes power. And since power tends to corrupt, she thinks it is too big a risk. Even though I have no plans to go anywhere near the dark arts, she is convinced they will find their way in, that the classes I teach will only lead to harder, darker stuff.’

I nod, thinking of Naddalin and Haven and seeing Lina’s point. Power in the wrong hands is indeed a dangerous thing.

‘Anyway, you interested?’

My eyes meet her, unsure of what she means.

‘In teaching a class?’

I balk, wondering if she is joking or serious, then seeing she is neither, just putting it out there. ‘Trust me, I don’t know the first thing about Wicca, or- or any of it. I’ve no idea how it works. I’m better off just giving the occasional reading, and maybe even trying to organize the mess.’ I gesture toward her desk, the shelves, about every available surface that is buried beneath a mound of papers and junk.

‘I was hoping you’d say that.’ She laughs some. ‘Oh, and just so you know, I clocked out the moment you walked in. Gone surfing if anyone asks.’ She gets up, moving toward the surfboard leaning against the far wall. ‘I don’t expect you to get it completely organized or anything, it’s too big a mess. But if you could get it into order, well-' She nods, looking at me. ‘You just might get a gold star.’

‘I’d rather have a plaque,’ I say, pretending to be serious. ‘You know, something nice that I can hang on the wall. Or even a statuette. Or a trophy- a trophy would be good.’

‘How about your parking space outback? I can probably swing that.’

‘Trust me, you already have.’ I laugh.

‘Yeah, but the one will have your name on it. Reserved for you only. No one will be allowed to park in it, not even off-hours. I will post a big warning that reads: CAUTION! THE SPACE RESERVED FOR AVALYNN ONLY. ALL Other’s WILL BE TOWED AWAY AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE.’

‘You’d do that? For reals?’ I laugh, eyes meeting her

She grabs her board, fingers gripping the edge as she heaves it under her arm. ‘You get the place cleaned up and there’s no limit to the rewards that await you. Today Employee of the Month, tomorrow-' She shrugs, tossing her dreads off her forehead and exposing her amazingly cute face.

Our gazes lock, and I know she is caught me again- caught me looking- wondering- thinking she is cute. So, I quickly look away, scratching at my arm, fiddling with my sleeve, anything to move past the moment toward something less awkward.

‘There’s a monitor in the corner there.’ She nods toward the far wall, back to business again. ‘That, combined with the bell on the door, should alert you to anyone coming in when you’re working back here.’

‘That, the bell on the door, and the fact that I’m psychic,’ I say, trying to sound lighthearted, though my voice is a little shaky, having not fully recovered from the awkwardness before.

‘Like the way, you accessed your powers when I snuck up on you?’ She asks, smiling in a nice open way, though her eyes are holding back.

‘That was different.’ I shrug. ‘You know how to shield your energy. Most people don’t.’

‘And you know how to shield your aura.’ She squints, head cocked to the side, those golden dreadlocks falling halfway down her arm as she focuses in on my right. ‘But I’m sure we’ll get to that later.’

I swallow hard, pretending not to notice how her vibrant yellow aura goes a little pink at the edges.

‘Anyway, it’s all pretty self-explanatory. The files need to be alphabetized, and if you could separate

’em by subject, that’d be great. Oh, and don’t bother tagging the crystals or herbs if you’re not familiar with them, I’d hate to get ’em confused. Though if you are familiar-' Her smiles, brow raised in such a way I immediately start scratching my arm again.

I gaze at the gleaming piles of crystals, some of which I recognize from the elixirs I made and the amulet I wear at my neck, but most of which are so foreign they are not even vaguely familiar.

‘Do you have a book or something?’ I ask, hoping her do since I would love to learn more about their

amazing abilities. ‘You know, so I can’- Find a way to sleep with my immortal boyfriend someday- so I can get them all tagged properly-And- stuff.’ I nod, hoping to appear like a hard worker rather than the self-motivated slacker I am. Watching as she drops her surfboard and turns back toward her desk, shuffling through a pile of books and retrieving a small, thick, well- worn tome from the bottom of the stack.

Turning it over in her hands, and gazing at the back when she says, ‘The has it all. If a crystal’s not in it, it does not exist. It is also loaded with pictures, so you can identify them.

Anyway, it should help,' she adds, tossing it to me.

I catch it between the palms of my hands, its pages vibrating with life as the contents surge through me. The entire book now imprinted on my brain as I smile and say, 'Believe me, it already has.'

I stare at the monitor, making sure Naddalin has left before taking the seat behind the desk and gazing at the pile of crystals. Knowing the book alone was not enough- they need to be handled to be understood. But just as I reach for a large red rock marked by streaks of yellow, my knee knocks

against the side of the desk, and my entire body grows itchy and warm- a sure sign that something needs my attention.

I push the chair back and lean forward, peering under the desk, noticing how the sensation grows stronger the lower I go. Following the feeling, until I have slid off my seat and dropped to the floor, fumbling around for the source, the tips of my fingers growing unbearably hot the second I touch the bottom left drawer.

I lean back on my heels, squinting at the old brass lock- the kind of deterrent meant to keep honest

people honest and dissuade those who do not know how to manipulate energy like me- closing my eyes as I ease the drawer open, only to find a pile of hanging files that are no longer hanging, an ancient calculator, and a pile of old and yellowed receipts. About to close it again when I sense the false bottom beneath.

I scoop up the papers and toss them aside before lifting the hatch and exposing an old, worn, leather-bound tome, its pages curled and fraying like a lost ancient scroll, the words Book of Shadows inscribed on its front. I place it on the desk before me, then sit there

and stare. Wondering why someone would go to so much trouble to keep the book hidden- and from whom?

Is Lina hiding it from Naddalin?

Or is it the other way around?

-And-

Since there is only one way to find out, I close my eyes and press my palm to its front, planning to read it in my usual way until I am slammed by a surge of energy so intense, so frenetic, so chaotic- it practically snaps crackles my bones.

I am hurled backward, my chair hitting the wall with such force it leaves a huge dent. The flickering remnants of random images still quivering before me and knowing full well why it was hidden- it is a book of witchcraft and spells. Divinations and incantations. Containing powers so potent it would be completely catastrophic in the wrong hands.

I steady my breath and stare at the cover, calming myself before I attempt to thumb through it. Fingers twitching, touching only the edges, as I peer at a cursive so small it is impossible to decipher. The bulk of the

pages inscribed with all manner of symbols, reminding me of the alchemical journals Naddalin's father used to keep- carefully written in code to protect the secrets within.

I flip to the middle, taking in a fine, detailed sketch of a group of people dancing under a full moon, followed by those of similar people engaged in complex rituals. Fingers hovering above the scratchy old paper and suddenly knowing deep in my bones that it is no mistake. I was meant to find the book.

Just like Naddalin hypnotized my classmates and put them all under

her spell, all I should do is weave the right incantation to convince her to divulge the information I need!

I turn the page, eager to find the right one, just as the bell on the shop door rings and I peer at the monitor to confirm it. Unwilling to budge ’til I am sure they are not going to turn right around and leave, that they are deeply committed to staying. Watching as the small, slim, black-And-white figure makes her way through the room- nervously glancing over her shoulder as though expecting to find someone there. And just as I am hoping she will leave, she goes straight to the

counter, places her hands on the glass, and waits patiently.

Great- I get up from the desk. Just what I need a customer. Calling, ‘Can I help you?’ before I have even had a chance to turn the corner and see that it is Jewell.

The second she sees me she gasps, jaw-dropping, eyes widening, appearing- frightened? The two of us gape at each other, wondering how to move past them.

‘Um, do you need something?’ I say, voice sounding more confident than I feel, as though I am in charge

around here. Taking in her long dark hair, the recent addition of copper streaks glinting under the lights, realizing I have never seen her alone until now. Never once been confronted by her, just the two of us, without Emmah or Mireille.

My mind wanders to the book in the back, the one I left on the desk, the one I need to return to at once, hoping whatever it is that she wants can be handled quickly and easily.

‘Maybe I’m in the wrong place.’ She pulls her shoulders in, twisting a silver ring around and around as her cheeks spot bright pink. ‘I think I-' She

swallows hard and glances back at the door, motioning awkwardly as she says, ‘I made a mistake, so I’m- I’m just going to go-'

I watch as she turns, her aura glowing a tremulous gray as she heads for the door. And even though I do not want to do it, even though I have a potential life-changing, problem-solving book to return to, I say, ‘It’s not a mistake.’ She stops, shoulders hunched, looking small and diminutive without the aid of her bully friend. ‘Seriously,’ I add. ‘You meant to come here. And who knows? Maybe I can help.’

She takes a deep breath, pausing for so long I am about to speak again when she turns. ‘There’s the guy.’ She picks at the hem of her shorts and gazes at me.

‘Naddalin.’ Sensing the answer without reading her thoughts or touching her skin, just knowing the moment my eyes meet her.

‘Yeah, um, I guess. Anyway, I um-' She shakes her head and starts again. ‘Well, I was just wondering if she was here. She gave me the.’ She pulls a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket and lays it flat against the glass,

smoothing the creases as she peers up at me.

‘She’s not here,’ I mumble, eyes grazing over the flyer advertising her Psychic Development Class level 1, thinking how she wasted no time. ‘You want to leave a message? Or sign up?’

I then study her carefully, never- ever having seen her so shy and uncomfortable before- with the ring twisting, eye darting, knee twitching- and knowing it is because of me.

She shrugs, gazing down at the counter as though fascinated by the jewelry inside. ‘No, um, don’t say

anything. I'll just come back some other time.' She takes a deep breath and pulls her shoulders back, trying to summon some of the usual revulsion reserved just for me, but failing miserably.

-And-

Even though part of me wants to soothe her, calm her, convince her there is o reason to act like the- I do not. I just watch as she leaves, making sure the door closes behind her before heading back to the book.

I do not think you ever really fall out of love with someone. I think

when you fall in love, like true love, it is love for life. All the rest is just experience and delusions.

Partition: 3

(Back to Black, and the paper)

And Scary- looking’ fang, indeed? said Stan, who had been watching Naddalin read.

Then she- murdered thirteen people ha? said Naddalin, hand sing she- page back to Stan, And with one curse?

-And-

Yep, said Stan, in front of witnesses and all.

It was in broad daylight even.

Big trouble it caused said Ern darkly, didn't it, Ern? She said not long after, to Stan who was looking over at her adjacently siting within also in the same booth, Stan swiveled in his armchair, his hands on the- back- better to look at Naddalin.

-And-

Besides Black encourages a big supporter of- You- Know- O-oo, she- said.

Then said Naddalin, without thinking. And what about, Ava? Even Stan’s pupils went white- as if dark energy when in him; and was being controlled by another person.

Then the train jerked back so hard that a whole farmhouse had to jump aside what looked like to the one side to avoid being streamed over with the darkness- still on top of it with the lamp beam in front shining upon it, and then looking again the farmhouse was Nevaeh’s old home, as we make our way to yet another porthole to the other side. And as Emmah said, it feels a whole lot safer when inside a vehicle.

And you outta be glad you are in here and not thinking you are being run over by it, he said- I knew a girl? She was nuts!!!...yelped Stan...

Sorry, said Naddalin hastily, but I know her too and it is not all how you make her out to be, she was in an accident, and traumatized by it, not mental. And Sorry, I - I forgot - that you know everyone... and everything.

...And forgot- that you were just another dumb boy! Besides, she said weakly.

And Joannah, my' heart's going' that fast... overall of this... one

being over you too, two being over the rail line being all crazy, and three being over all the news of Black.

-And-

So-o, - so Black was a supporter of the mother and her girls?

And Naddalin prompted apologetically, said I do not think So-o.

And yes, and said Stan, still rubbing her chest, he is and was, and still is I feel, sorry to disagree with you.

And Yeah, that is right, now that you feel that way?

He is close to them even related- by blood.

Partition: 4

They say… anyway when little Naddalin- got her- better of You-Know-'O-oo- the mother of the four girls. And ava’s object of desire- forever, NEVER- EVER letting going of her longing for lust- and love, even if… even if she has no looks at the former girl she once was. Therefore she called the tower to see her the tarot card… the show’s a formidable force to be reckoned with, the mother then?

‘Yes!’

Then - Naddalin nervously flattened her bangs down again - ‘And All- You- Know-' Oo’s supporters were tracked down, wasn’t they, Stan?

Most of’ em knew it was all over, when- You- Know-'O-o-o went absent for both worlds, and they came silently for years. Like us, we knew she was planning and was up to no good.

But not Trirus Black.

I heard her- thought I would be second- in- command once You-Know-'O-o’ taken over your mind body and soul. But no- it went down her side of the family more than his- Chiaz

Naztherth, somehow Emmah would have been a little niece, why she was also tinted by the evil hands of the hex of the girl’s family and mother, some say that Emmah was Chiaz unborn child, a child that he never had, that only lived for 48 hours (about 2 days), within Nevaeh, and passed, over running out of the air, she was baby number two, also a hex within the family ever baby that is number two passes. Yet this was never really talked about, Jaylynn's death was more heart barking.

-And-

Anyway, they cornered Black in-the-middle of a street full of humans and Black took out his revenge on the would kill all that was in his path and blasted ‘em right in the- street all apart brain splatted the roadway, and a wizard got it to see it all, that wizard was- Naddalin dad, who understood the why… of it all, know it was the hex, nothing more nothing less, it took over his mind, she um- his little girl in pain always.

-A reporter for the press said about her story after her death- in not so many words. ‘Someone like Nevaeh- if they believe in the supernatural, that

she was losing her wit and mind. it was said to me that she says- G*h*OsT'S-OOO- HA!' AND HIS HANDS SHOOK MUCKING HER.

Hum so maybe that unborn child was a hunt for years- that she was is in the glass that leads to the other side, the mother was seeing her baby, maybe that it- she was never crazy- said Naddalin swiftly.

They typewriter print out would give the clues to that also, matching her story.

’Horrible, eh? And you know what Black did then? And Stan continued in a dramatic whisper.

And what, are you trying to say? Said Naddalin.

Then laughed, Stan, and just stood there and laughed. It is a good thing I like you for you said Naddalin or I would walk away now and not look back. ‘Hell- you have your head so far up your ass, you need to fart to breath!’

And when reinforcements from the- Bureau of Magic got there are everything went quiet as everything, went still all quite in its place of, closes

to mad he is or surpasses, indeed, Ern? Indeed, mad he is they say, and I say too.

-And-

Besides If she- weren't when the- went to Dizeryland, she- will be now, said Ern in her slow voice, so you could not remember this, as you could you? So, you must be her… aren't you?

'I must- then- if you say so…'

'I say so- 0o…'

...Confess!!!

Besides like- I would blow myself up before I set foot in that place,

said Emmah, and undoubtedly, they all agreed. Serves him right, to have been locked up for whipping innocent people down mind you… after what he- did… was so heinous that I can wrap my mind around it.

‘Heinous-' Think of treason, torture, the bashing of babies such as children shot at point black rage in the freaking head- he did not care most over them were under the age of 14. She yells’ hurling her hands about!

-And-

They had a job covering it up, of the fact he was one of them, didn't they?

Then and there- said Stan.

And ‘whole street blown up and all them nonmagical peoples dead, Dariez said in her small-town talkative way that only she could- with babbling in- between. Ern- What was it they said joining in? ‘No!’

They said thinking she had no place in the conversation, now’s he is out to do it again- and we could be his next manslaughter, said Stan,

investigative-ly retelling the-newspaper… moving text and picture.

An explosion, groaned Evelyn with her truly light blonde hair and blue eyes say- we overheard her saying- in a soft sweet voice- ‘I am glad that love, is like- now a thing- ie again like along with like- feeling and is no longer band to the world we live, it was said there was a time that love was forbidden.

…Of course!

Thought Naddalin, not saying anything just overhearing, think poor girl is here over not feeling or having

love, and wanted to go back and life live as if she could have. Black's gaunt face again is making me want to spit out my coffee.'

There has never- ever been a breakout from the prison before… God, they are even placed on a rock Island with sheer drop-offs on all sides.

'How did he get a boat…?'

They knew about it and let him out? Ern questioned.

Beats me how we did it, said Dariez all frightened, eh.

Mind you, I cannot understand to think that he would have some

within the wall of the jail a guard even remotely bribed, to make this kind of escape. Eh, said Ern?

-And-

Evelyn suddenly shivered, saying if he here, or even within one of us?

And talk about meeting different face what if that face is him, yet looks like Stan, there is a good child; that you just met.

Those guards give me the-collywobbles.

-And-

Stan put the- paper away reluctantly, And Naddalin leaned against the- the window of the- Knight train, and sighed, feeling worse than ever in her given lives. She- could not help imagining what Stan might be telling the passengers in a few nights' time, about her even, she was still the same old girl so paranoid and trusting no one.

And hear about this and that and no- truths-? And about me being someone I am not, and then some I might be.

Killed up his aunt, family grandmother, and six little ones! Along with all those others… my- God!

We admire all the gossip on the- Knight train, didn't we that go down into the otherworld- the underworld of all things lovely in its dark whimsical, ghoulish, and magical, do we not Ern? Whom- was sitting in the next booth over at this point chipping in now and then on the ride.'

He was trying' to run for it… and found the tracks of the magic railways, and made it, by getting so far and become one of us- I just know it- I just know, said Naddalin.

-Then-

Formerly, Naddalin had broken wizard law just like Trirus Black, saying that she was for helping a girl on the outside of the world, yet it was all for the right reasons. Over the Aunt uncle bad enough she was charged with 1,500 dollars in having a lawyer, and a mug- shot- and fingerprints? Nothing came out of help Dariez thoughts in her mind.

Her hand so tiny they thought she was underage… said the judge, he even said you are like a child.

Naddalin did not know anything about the- prisoner- yet, looking back in her mind and thoughts remembering her own life as the girl in the story and her times sitting in a jail cell over them, on rations, though everyone she had ever heard speaks too did not want to remember or was withheld from remembering So-o in the- same fearful tone, of pretending not too, even if they looked deep into their thoughts to remember all this; the memory was altered.

She replayed to that saying and to think, that everyone then that thought they knew you thought you

that you did nothing but lay around with your fingers in your puss, said Dariez.

Well your damned one way or the other in that hometown- you do one thing and is said to be another is another you say one thing and they think your another- if you do or do not it now and with or as they want to see and read it to be in their low comprehension and mental existence- or lacking one…

…A life and brain, said the girls unanimously filling the end of the sentence!

Confess!!! Said the girl in her face noses almost touching.

Remember this- ‘It’s just all right to have some defecated in your mouth and you have to swallow it, yet don’t you dare say anything back, they will not take your shit.’ Said Naddalin.

I am not- entitled to a mistake, no one ever at any age for 3 and up, I cannot have one! Best to remember that also… when questioning the why- of it all. I cannot take the blame for my past when my soul was soled agents my well and I had no say- in the matter- of whatever fact they said for the day or week to week contracts.

And so-o in saying all that, I cannot say that I am or not.

~*~

‘At the school for girl’s gamekeeper, had spent two months there only last year, showing girls what could happen if they're bad- or bad- er’ then bad.’ Said Dariez using poor English as only she could…

Naddalin would not soon forget the- look of terror on Emmah and some of the other girl's faces when she- had been told where she- was going, and Emmah was one of the- bravest people Naddalin knew. She was going there…

if she did not change her ways… and spending the night might just make her love life that she was given, and not complain, about seeing the thing go her way- even if that is playing God or destiny. Even if you have power now over that too by being her you do not always- have all the cards to play. Even if there is a thing as hell's purgatory, you need to see the light- to either go up or down. Or be happy here with all of us that love you!

The- Knight train rolled through the- darkness, scattering bushed and trashcans, junked cars, windmills, telephone booths and trees

alike, on its old winding path hidden in all the tall grasses, you could not even see the track or rail ties, as she was laying on her bed looking out that arched windows of the Pullman car, there Naddalin lay, restless and miserable, on a single bed with her sheets jumbled around her.

Partition: 5

I look at my (Retro Style) Flip Desk Shelf Clock and think about home, and think that time does not mean a thing here...

Stan is over there singing- ‘you put your penis in, and you put your

penis out, you put your penis back in, and then have her shake it all about; you do the sex together and turn her back around, and that’s what it is all about!’

The girls in the train car are rolling their eyes and giggling and shaking their heads.

Though- I am sure to love this boy to death, ha- remember death and remembering boys like that and your dumb love that is so cute it hurts to look at when you are not, I see the looks on the other girl's faces, I remember that too.

So, in other words back on earth if I were to back when I was a pre-teen and teenage girl if I would frap more, and I would have thought about death less- hum?

After a while, Stan remembered, that Naddalin had paid for hot chocolate, but poured it all over Naddalin's pillow when the- train moved brusquely from Lackawanna ruing the path of the Susquehanna hitting all the ghost towns, on a rail line that just should not be there; like a ghost town trail, a haunt of the past, and like a- whistle echoing in a squall of wind.

Making quick stops along the way, one by one, wizards, fallen angels, and witches in dressing gowns and slippers go downhill to meet this stopped steam train on its way- down to the other world- of all things magic, leaving the stations. they all looked incredibly pleased to go, down under- some for the first time- after their death. Finally, Naddalin was and they were not the only passenger on.

And at once, Neville, and said Stan, clapping their hands- saying, new souls, and whereabouts in Pennsylvania- are you from as they

announced their name over the intercoms?

-And-

And- Hellhole Alley, said Naddalin, going up to her old stomping grounds.

‘How would you know?’ Emmah said suspiciously.

And the right to said Stan- looking at Haven and hold on tightly- is what she said.

-Then-

BOOM!!!

The- moment it opened, then set off short pinching screams within all the cars - where are we, they- did not know, only- I. The- would lie low for what felt like a couple of hours, they were thundering along Cross Road- light flashing in a blur. Naddalin sat up and observed buildings and benches enfolding themselves out of the Knight train's way. The- sky was getting a little lighter.

The train slammed on the- brakes and the- Knight train skidded to a halt in front of a small and shabby- looking pub called the Susquehanna- house, next to The- Freeman hotel, and

the A- J's feed mill, behind which lay the- magical entrance to my railway- almost next to the village of Chery- Tree- home of The Cozy Corner Café.

Thanks, Naddalin said to Ern.

(Thought the porthole sparks flew- and everything went dark and another world- glowing in shades of green shadowy dark trees that are black seem to be lunging at us as the flickers of the lanterns on the outside of the coach's lit them slightly.)

They- jumped down the- steps, and the- leaped- Stan lowers the trunk down with baby Raven's cage onto the-

tarmac or gravel. And Well, said Naddalin. And Bye then- along with Dariez yet, again!

-And-

Nonetheless, Stan was not paying attention, or maybe- that is just part of the act with him too- yet, I do think he is okay- I do. Still standing in her- the doorway to the- train she- was goggling at the- shadowy entrance to the- dripping stone arched passageway up to the castle.

Before Naddalin could turn, the- bend there was a hand on her shoulder. Besides there you are,

Naddalin, said a voice, it was Maiara Chenoa. It was a sweet reunion, with hugs and kisses too…!

At the- same time, Stan shouted, Joannah!

Ern, come here…!

Come here…!

They were reacquainted in what seemed like- forever to them.

-And-

Naddalin looked up at- in her hand was her old notebook, and she saw her old handwriting, within a random page, a note that did not make

into her published book- that she never saw- until after her days of days, it said.

“Even in someone else’s body, with my mind, I may like to perceive things differently as if I was them; then in my mind, with thoughts shard.”

It was rolled out over the facet it made her sound crazy! She ponders the why and said even my words are still being twisted, over some putting the thoughts to mine, about my thoughts.

The- owner of the- hands-on her shoulder and felt a warm cascade into her body- she- had walked right

into her old friend that she had does not see for years, after she moved away.

Stan then leaped onto the- gravel beside them.

And What did- jah call Neville, Martita?

No this her- this girl standing her is- Maiara.

‘Oh!’ He said. ‘Sorry for mispronouncing your name-'

She said it happens more than you would think.

WELL Then- it was said- eagerly.

a small little girl in a long, pinstriped Housecoat and PJ's, looked cold and exhausted- yet aglow within her body and a new spark in her eyes seeing an old friend.

Also, Neville- questioned the friendship of the two of them.

Then she- repeated, frowning, saying- 'I KNEW IT- I KNEW IT ALL ALONG, Naddalin- IS _____.'

(GASP!)

-And-

Besides, I knew it- ALL ALONG!

Besides Stan shouted elatedly.

‘Ern! Ern!’ Guess- WHO SHE IS-?

I can see the mark!

-And-

I can see the blemish too!

Partition: 6

‘Yes,’ she said crossly, saying think it does not say it my life is on the line and well end up at the mercy of her, I am glad the- knight train picked Naddalin up- Maiara said, but she- and

I need to head inside and have a private girl chat, just she and I to remember all things of days gone by.

She amplified her the- pressure on Naddalin's shoulder saying come one we have a lot to do just you and me, and Naddalin found herself being steered inside yet, overjoy- d at the same time.

A slouching figure bearing a lantern appeared through the- door behind them- now sting at the public-house- for refreshments. A hermit, toothless, saying beware of HER- she is back, and running- her mind within the

body of a killer- and that killer I just become- YOU!

And you have her, Martita- UNDER YOUR THUMB! The creature said- SAID, with no face- in a creepy-creepy whisper.

She said yes, I know who she is, and like old times nothing has changed with her, I will kill her- you can put that in your report back… And Will you be wanting anything more if not-

NOW GET THE HELL OUT OF MY FACE! She could odor of must

coming from his breath, and the chill of death within the voice.

‘YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED-'

it said as if faded away within the gust of chill wind. Now back to you and me, it is good to see you, it has been So-o long! Would you girls like something a server asked, ‘Um- perhaps a pot of tea, for she and me,’ she still had not let go of Naddalin- using riddle’s- over that fact her worlds got in the way, back in the day.

‘You have not changed at all on the inside, have you?’

‘Sh-h.’ She put her finger up to her lip.

See your forgetting, that I can foresee the future, and tell the past and change the present- fortune-telling. I am here to tell you that you are in grave danger, and I am here for you always, like before… you may have passed down the globe, yet it has not moved on the hex is with you, party her in a sense yet your still the one they want to rip apart- not her- even if, she has the prophecy and has become the old you, they have found you out, and she after your very soul!

(Back to the group)

There was a loud scraping and puffing from behind them, as they got off the train, and Stan and ern appeared- slowly out of it as it was encircling them, carrying Naddalin’s trunk and Baby Raven’s cage- after all, it was the manly thing to do, and looking around excitedly, and it was turning Dariez on, she was wanting to be all clingy.

And how come you did not think she would tell us who she was, eh, Neville- what do you think?

I think thereafter her or just she!

‘Who’s she?’

‘The mother…!’ said Stan, beaming at Naddalin who was holding has with her girlfriend of the past, while Evelyn’s a school girl’s flying horse peered interestedly over Stan’s shoulder, snorting and nah- ing.

Besides a private parlor, please, for us girls- Naddalin said pointedly. It would be nice to have one of the larger rooms tonight to tête- à- tête about boys- girls, all things that contain to love- and a pillow fight.

And ‘Bye- boys’ the girls said as some of them skipped on the backs of

their hills to their new room for the night, waving too.

‘We have all had the pleasure of meeting her… Unfortunately!’

‘She has all given us SHIT!’ IT WAS SAID- AROUND THE ROME IN SO MANY WAYS- REFERRING TO THE FACT.

I met her! And they went to the group talking about the girl that should not be named, and her mother. You could see this world's sun drop, and the flying creatures' bed down for the night, like the flying horses, and birds only know this magical world too.

Besides, I must have been the- last to know that she- killed all the people! Said Maiara. You- being one of the Lily… so it as true, it was she did it, and you were just at the wrong place at the wrong time…

Naddalin- I can say- and yes, I would say that- would be what is implied.

(In the girl's washroom)

And then showing a haunt, a ghost of Nevaeh appeared- It was me what rescued you, Lily, over- Alyssa's, and AVA- and those sisters, and all the girls did what they did you, and I spent

so much time at your house after you were killed!

Little did they know that this was the sole of the body of the girl they knew too well, and her mind was in the body of Naddalin next to them. And her heart had stopped beating a long time ago, yet it never grows cold to her girlfriends in the room.

They Just got to her before I, and her father’s death… not long after, and my life- was going on- and on forever, and I still feel as if I could have done more, she was nothing but- remains, poor little thing, I never forgot, with a great slash across Lily’s

temple, she remembered- all the times they played to gather in a flashback of their youth, it was moving like a film strip- in sepia, ripping way, you could see the blush- of small N a marking they made on her saying- someday this well marking on you will bring us to a girl- that you once knew, that we will kill- in front of you, and them too, and you'll bring us to her- Lilly, she washed for bed- and said- I should let you know your name starts with an N, and So-o did yours- she takes her by both hands saying- Neveah- be careful.

(Odd like the letter missing on my old typewriter- oop- ie's, and she

covered her mouth- at that moment she flew into her arms.)

Lily- Never occurred to me what she- was doing there, yet I prayed for her death dearly. And I want to say thank you, and I am sorry for you having live with my sins- even if I did not have any, as a teen girl, under the thumbs of the girls that were every part of me over being begrudging of me being more them, I was not and could never- ever, but to them, I must have been a threat?

I knew Lily was my Secret-Keeper, for years, I always trusted her, yet- yet I was wondering if this were a

pot or if she were her- never did I think in my life did I think that someone could take over your mind and thoughts- yet it seems like my mind can be raped at any moment be them, I knew she wanted to me, and to understand my new being- yet I was reluctant.

Yet, I knew that she knew- and would understand; she always did… thought she had just heard the- news- about all the attack and come to see what she- could do for me, or to see if I was- taken over by them again.

Even if, it looked like- I may have killed you just remember- there

the one that had control of my- mind, body, and soul. They may have my soul and damn it to hell now, and they had their fun with my body, yet no one will take my mind from me, even I must split into the other bodies.

White and shaking she was, and yen's know what I did? I COMFORTED her- MURDERING- they all think they lost their minds, yet it was her getting her revenge within their minds, going back was worth it to see them dye- said sweet little Lily, with her hair ribs hand on either side of her sweet little childlike face.

You know what… good for you- because, I would have killed them too! ‘I am salivating just think about it!’

And Lily roared saying- ‘I am not a little wimpy pussy of a girl anymore for them to diddle- now it's my time to diddle them.’

I never knew you to talk like that… I said. My mouth dropped… such language out of her mouth- remember her as So-o sweet and oh so innocent and a church mouse.

‘Please! ’She said- ‘innocent?’

That is not a sad thing to be remembered for Lily- like at Karly-

which is better? They were going through her chapters and photos of her former life, later that night, saying well this could be your legacy.

She said at least I would have had one…

Then said Professor McDermott was walking past the girl's room- arched wood door, that is medieval- also in the look, the room softly touched lit. she said- 'girls- keep your voice's down!'

-And-

And How was I to know she- was not upset about Lily and Adriane's

there still girl-girl and girlfriends, fear is why they are not- you would understand. I must kiss her always and do as she takes- still, yet I learn to love her. Adriane has changed… she is sweet now- to all, and the cutest evil angel, you ever did see- and she winked at me. Her look and attitude have completely changed, you would not even know her- she is so sympathetic, nice, and gentle; she has also disowned her family- for me, and that was the deal, or I would not have agreed.

‘I can forgive… even in the mysterious world, and I get to say, that I have done that for her.’

‘I cannot-' Naddalin said back.

Alyssa with you?

Not yet- she is happy to be with my ghost- she has not found me yet- you know who is trying!

Naddalin- the funniest thing- is that I see them here every day in class too and she has known idea who I am… And I am trusting you to keep it that way- you understand.

Lily- It was You- Know- Who she- cared about, getting at you, not all the girls- they just followed what she said to do!

Naddalin- The mother and that-girl… well never change- what do they want from us? They want you to bow to them, and worship their every word and want and desire.

(The tower card that will never fall…) said Naddalin.

Partition: 7

…And then Lily- says, ‘Give Naddalin to me, she is saying it with inflamed eyes all controlled- by another’s dark mind, I’m your garden of you, after all, it was all creepy and her head tilted to the one side, I’ll look after her- she said back in a possessed

whisper overpowering the possessed with her power of worlds-' Ha, it said- you are too incompetent!

Nonetheless, I had had my orders from Duriez's mom and dad, about her wanting her own life. That said me, and my type was no longer welcome, with their family, to help in her life in any way I was to blame for them losing their little girl- they said, yet she must of not taking to the hex, that I want to pass down- that I try to selfishly give to her solely, it is all back with me- why? I questioned, I could feel it, that now meaning that they could track me down- like radar, and she

ratted me out too… or did Lily? Or has my luck run out? And even Duriez was acting odd- as if she were- NOT-herself.

I knew they got to her and took over her body and mind- and her soul was banished over me anyway, so in the way, it was all my fault.

I know who- I have my money on- do you? And I told know no one about me, yet they both know- it seems they are all getting to know the real me- and that scars met the most, Duerre said I was to go to her aunt and uncle’s, to get her and my things, she

was leaving forever- and not to come back.

That is when Back ran into our room- when I was thrown up into the air ready to be ripped to pieces, that is when he lipped protecting me- coming out of hiding, as one of the professors and pulling all the entities out of my body and take them in himself, into his body.

Black argued- with me saying ‘I’m one of the good ones- I am here for you, they did the same to me, before you- there was my girl- they were after, she was a lot like you.’

Her name was- Naddalin, and you become her! I am your biological father, and even if you became her, I will protect you from them! Now and always…!

She is always with me you know that… I am saying to him- with a true running down my face.

Black- but in the- end, the- same way you did do ever gave in. I even changed my name and look yet they still got me to kill for them- and be their simple fool- and pulled the strings if you well!

‘They made me give you to them that night up or I would be punished- and oh was I, when you were just in your playpen- all those years back- Naddalin, I am living- too like you be only existing. I even had to sleep with the mother- or I would have been killed, chopped up into little bits- and marched nude about the streets- stoned and locked in a dungeon chained to a wall with no lights and no sounds other than the bats dropping shit on me and the cold ground around me, it was open to the elements- rain, sleet, hell, and high water too- winters to distorting sizzling summer days- also stripped of

my pried- they tried to break me at the prison!’

So, I backed off- and let them do this to you- and for that, I am remorseful for- yet there was nothing I could do.

I won’t need to live on anymore,’ he- says if mean’s that you do. I may not be your dad, yet I feel as if I am, I know who you are!

NEVAEH!

I know…

Partition: 8

I should have known-

There was something devious going on then. She- loved her dad more than anything, what was she- given- was a chance to live on and she did not take it so I took her body, she did it for me to live undercover? Her dad never really- knew until now- that I was all to blame and felt if I was, and I feel shame yet once more for being alive and causing pain to others, yet as I said- they will not let me die- even if I have tried over and over to do So-o. They want me to feel pain, aching, and discomfort- always- in everything, that was the plain alalonga remember?

Why wouldn’t’ she- need him it anymore that all I ever wanted was my dad back- and you know who was at the bottom of us all losing out on love and loved ones alike?

What the freak her is a problem? I thought… The fact was, I was too easy to trace.

Duriez knew she had been the Secret- Keeper, with her crystal, and about me- I wonder if she squealed and give them the ball of my life and lives after. And just like that, a small voice in my had said, ‘NO!’ this is not my fault- blame the one you always trusted! She

has gone bad for them, she was charmed- into this you know.

I's did not know what to think- still in shock of all the overwhelming information coming into my mind- everything like always- seeming as if, all at one time.

'I would bust the crystal ball yet all the stories of the past and your old life would vanish in the shards of glass.' She said holding the ball in her little and with it aglow- seeing the old me, that could be life go to shards of the floor at any moment, yet I was looking through her eyes- also with tears saying it is time to let the life of

the past go- I was inside of her my eyes were now her eyes looking in and reflected both me and her in the stare of the glass- I could see the colors of visions- looking in- and then it hit the floor, and part of me died over them yet again.

I never give much to see life come to end, not my own through new- younger eyes other them my own- reflecting at me- yet at that moment, my life end closing chapter, I was lost between souls and bodies, of other girls- that saved me from ending- to them when it was my choice all along… right? Now the only thing documented

about me is in the text, and to me is what is retold about me in its light, it is different from seeing everything for it was within the glass ball- for day one and up like a movie flashback. All my memories- I put in there for safekeeping- out of my head so they could not corrupt them over being mean- shattered to the wind in one night never to get back- ever.

Yet that is what they wanted just maybe, now they will leave me alone…! I thought this uncertain, shyly, and indefinitely.

‘Oh well, what is the use of thinking at all at this point, just for my

thoughts to be shattered- too- by them, the real me was gone.

Black knew this was a blow to me- and he said- ‘I would not plan on it…’

‘…It came along and knocked my wind out- God's honest- truth!’

~*~

Subconsciously, it takes at least 6- 8 months for the brain to process complete forgiveness for someone who hurt you emotionally. Yet that has been my life… so you would think by now I would be used to it.

He- was going to have to run for it that night- and he did and lied to me, he knew it was a matter of hours before the- Bureau was going to be after him not her- she always gets away with everything- she always did and always well.

But what if I had given- you Naddalin up to her then… eh?

Do you think you should have?

No, and she avoided the dialog, ‘everyone thought that you were lost and drowned sea- we until they found out otherwise.’

‘The best friend’s girl-girlfriend was you if you were under the spell! That is why I was okay with this along.’ Nonetheless, when one of us goes over to the- Dark Side, there is nothing and no one that matters to them anymore…

-And-

A long silence followed the story of how he escaped- not only the jail by having them in his mind.

About the time asked about the latter, Madam Rosette walked in asking if I was okay, she said with some satisfaction, seeing Black- that she

knew for years, I see you have made it back to us, and she- said I see that you did not manage to disappear- completely, did you- even if you should have and know how too-?

The- Bureau of Magic caught up with you- and they have you to have they not- NADDALIN? She said in a demeaning way.

‘You can face your problems if you’re not facing them,’ she said rapidly.

‘Why would I want to I have don’t that all my life’s and yes, I said lives’.’

-And-

That is when she said you need to come with me Black- I know that you are not the blame- not the bad guy yet that is not how they feel… and even I, have to say that you are the one they saw doing the act of crimes.

(Some time has passed)

Black is locked in the castle dungeon- he could overhear them talking, and sadly, if only we had, and said Harlan bitterly, the evidence saying you are not to blame for it all.

And It was not we who found her- it was him that led us to you-

missie and you think you are so smart and cute- they said this as they were marching to the washroom, to have their way with her- like in the past before- making her their sexual bitch before asking her to kill for them- so they could live on in new bodies. Or to just kill me and end it all here.

It was little Kellie- another of her' friends that walked in and saw it all go down. Annoyed by grief, no doubt, and knowing that Black had been Neveah Secret- Keeper all these years, Mazel Amsel went after Black herself, along with her girls, torture him in mid-evil ways- right down to

castrating the man, until he gave in to saying, like- were Naddalin was and all. It was either do it or die a final death, of hell in their wrath.

-And-

Kellie… that little girl who was always tagging around after I was one of their brainwashed spies at the school? Said Madam Rosette- one of the eldest women- to teach if not the older at 1,606 years old, to me later that evening, at the lunch table.

‘She has seen this before, yet never quite like this, she said they she was always, like that even when she

was a little girl want everyone's attention, or you have to pay for not giving it to her, she was always a sneaky odd child, she said, even then… very dark in her ways- and eyes that would like and pass through you in a jolting wave- of then run a terror, I would know she made me feel, that way even in my classroom, pass me or I will kill you, and pass your soul to waste- I never figure out how she becomes so powerful maybe you can?' She said in a whisper- of fear.

'She- worshipped Black, yet he would never give her the time of day, he would not give himself up to her in a

way, and that drove her farther into madness, some say- I too. Odd that your only choices here in bodies were her daughter, that you have become, and this was chosen for you out of resentment in fate- twisted by them, I am sure to say to you. Ava was the mother of you do you see?'

That is why she is inside you and you can hear, and she knows your thoughts, just like her with black you were the élite of her soulmate and you refused, so she will take. Yet some say you belong to the mother, that also is a mystery shrouded within secrecies- covered up.

At once said Professor McDermott, that all I know about this yet you may want this it is her child hold a crystal ball, like yours she to your life memories now you take hers, still them and then smash this if you can?

‘If I can?’

‘Yes…’

Good luck I have been trying for years now, the shard shatter and then moments later come back together, looking her power, within it of how she got where she is, you destroy this you have broken into a part of her

soul that she will never get back and that good maker her weaker- and you more powerful.

‘How do I destroy it?’ She squalled having her old high-pitched childlike voices come through her.

‘This for you to search your soul and hers- and others that were finds and foes to like to find out-the key lies within you.’ She said vaguely.

‘She was never quite about her union, talent-wise, she wanted you me us- them to all to know- her claim to fame, and cheating her way to- using whatever or whomever it took to get

there. It is all in the ball, a lot of NASTY- NASTY SEX! Things I have never heard of… yet that how a woman gains power- NO? IT ALL LAY WITHIN HER- private parts. I SHOULD know to be a Catholic school girl and having a priest, use me, for years has his- lover, yet I became a Nun, I even had a baby girl to the man that was 7 mounts in- she was cut out of me- he committed manslaughter- burn her in the firebox to heat the larger school- that was only for girls like me- and the ashes scattered and then buried within the old school grounds in the basement- I was not alone in this there lots of girls

baby's down there in the lowest level of that private rich school in Cresson, Pennsylvania, known for their mercy…'

'…Yet the habit covered that too, like the churches compassion- towards us girls having been prayed on by the holy- and made to fear. That is why I am here… that is why, and I not saying- that I am wrong that is why- l,606 years passed- I not caving, I am right- and I have my rights- as a woman.'

'I was often hasty sharp with her, in my class for she was lazy. You can imagine how I am- now- I was more strict then- how I regret that now… I

should have just let her have her way, and none of this would have happened? Maybe the blame for this all is on me?'

-And-

She- sounded as though she would- had a sudden head cold, and lost all strength within her old decrepit body- that was dropping with age- gray hair all stingy- yes faded without much color, yet that was my punishment to age, and not stop, till I admitted- I was wrong- for being used as a pile of rubbish can- in every way a girl could be used as one. And there, now, Minerva, she was hysterical crying about the events she just witnessed and

said Harlan kindly to take her to the hall for ice cream- as the good little girls do, and Madam Rosette died in her shoe's- her last death, she was the key to the next step.

Eyewitnesses - of course, yet not to their worlds of cover everything up or else, we rubbed their memories out later- we were told this, so there would be no panic. Everything that we saw with- Black, and them know who I am- it bad enough have them against me I do not need this entire world too- by them making an army- with her being the all-mighty power over all- yet

I feel that will happen at some point- don’t you?

They say, Minerva- was sobbing,’ Lily and Alyssa, over know more about Trirus- than any of the others! That she was seeing him on and off, after the escape, romantically. How could you? They said to her, she was so week she could not speak for the tears.’ And then she- went for the crystal ball- for them- not us, yet it was a lost journey on her part.

Well, of course, Black was quicker, he had all of them deceived in think it was someone other than himself, he tried places with her, yet

they somehow did not see that just happen.

Blowing Alissa's memories of her and Chiaz smithereens be she dropped the ball… her past life… No-? Yes! …Gone in a blink of an eye, that is what Minerva did for me by bringing this ball, the wrong one, yet the right one for me- little did she know I ready know the plan. IT WAS PAYBACK!!! And this all reviled the spell she had him under, it is not going to get him back to me- yet I feel justice has been made. She can burn in hell now- where she should be- that one less I must fight!

Then- Professor McDermott blew her nose, in her slave and said thickly, and said ‘Stupid girl… foolish girl… you are- always hopeless at clashing… a fantasy of freedom and choice- that you’ll never have. I should have left it to the- Bureau, over this all I am sick of cover your ass!’

‘You're blaming me?’ She said with an airy breath within a gasp.

And I tell yen’s, if I’d got to Black before little Emmah did, I wouldn’t’ve messed around with wands or crystal ball with children she said, after all, you cannot trust them, if your you and all - no you’re going to be

ripped her limb- from- limb, over having these children to your business, and that all this is personal, and that how you're taking it, and you are putting our children at risk, I will tell you this now as she was slamming her middle finger hard into her chest, '… you have any of our children in any danger- I will kill you myself, by ripped you limb- from- limb, you understand!' and she was screaming two inches from her face at this point.

In the background looking out the castle's large ornate arched windows, you could see children at play

innocently- who are fallen angels are flying in the dusking sky.

Professor McDermott- ‘Playing tag, or hid and seek and juvenile games like that… as children do, after all even here they are still children. There here over the fact they wanted freedom, and out of an overbearing life, you- yes, you there- girl, don’t take that away from them over personal- Baby- field- BABY SHIT!’

‘When is this war going to be over with you?’ She asked. And you do not know what you are talking about, Emmah, Dariez- and you too with the eyes and the face… she said sharply-

your just kids; they were backtalking, her word and authority.

-And-

Nobody but trained Success Sorcerers from the- Magical Law Enforcement Squad would have stood a chance against Black once he- was waylaid, so what makes you think you would, or that they could stop her- even if… Mazel Amsel and her family of girls, are more powerful then all of us combined, she can and will not be stopped ever- and you are the blame- YOU. What you did was shity- and self-centered.

Naddalin- ‘YET IT’S A-OKAY FOR THEM TO WHATEVER THEY WANT TO ME WITH NO CONCUBINES, AND THAT’S FINE, I DARE NOT SAID UP FOR MY RIGHTS- NO- FUCK NO, THAT WOULD BE WRONG! And her fist is clenching her caller, you will kill me… ha- ha?

‘I was junior in the- Division of Magical Upheavals at the- time, and I was one of the- first on the- scene after Black murdered all those people, I was there I know that he is the one that did this, I saw it with my own eyes.’

‘You don’t know half of what you think you do!’ Said Naddalin.

Professor McDermott- ‘Oh there she goes again playing the victim.’ She said when she was finally, let go of, and she had enough strength after her knees shaking- out of tear to speak. I, I will never forget it. I still dream about it sometimes.’

‘Your dream is nothing like my nightmares! I can assure you of that.’ Said Naddalin, as Nevaeh, her real personality was coming through her more than ever before, within her transformation. He blasted a hollow in-the-middle of the- street, so deep it had cracked the- sewer below.

‘Yes, that maybe So-o yet was it all him- or all in his mind.’

‘I knew it you are crazy!’

‘Yes- we know’ said one of the girls landing on her feet her back feathered wings retracting back into her back drawing quickly and almost unnaturally- ‘Bodies everywhere- blow to pieces nothing left but nude kids body parts laying on one another- down in the hole, when they picked thought all the remands- there was nothing to bury- that was identifiable other than the sex, so they just covered everything over and said we don’t care and made the road on top of the mass grave,

there is not even a headstone, marking the day in history.'

All the nonmagic people were screaming. 'WE KNOW'- they screamed- and we are more intelligent than just unintellectual kids.

And Black standing there laughing nude- completely mad- foaming at the mouth even, as the day he was born- shackled in his holding cell, with what was left of the shards of the ball within his feet that are bleeding blood that is only of this world… leaking blood, covering bloodstained rots of neighboring lingering, haunting, and melancholy

tree on the outside working their way in, of the ground underneath- start grabbing around his body weaving vines, and veins- like charming bowling constrictors- those too were linking his body snacks- and the worms for the ground were eating into his mind, everything was sucking the life out of him feeding the land, and the castle ground was breaking it all up- life was given back.

And the oddest thing in the moment of darkness there was a small ray of light showing down on him on his face, and he was in a world all his own in paces. Even if it was also sucking the

life out of him- he had done his afterlife missions.

A few- just a few fragments of the glass were sucked up within him- overpowering his awareness, seeing all the memories, of one the girl's life that terrorized his daughter, he teared up, thinking how said they are and pathetic.

All voices stopped abruptly- as he linked with all her minds and conscientiousness- they saw what he saw about Alissa Amsel the blonde hair, blue-eyed girl, everything about her life even the things that a girl would never show to others, was reviled- and how

she was a bully and terrorist- in the sweet-looking covering the body of yearning, to all that were under her spell. He screamed and inside coming out of his mouth with this black steam like gushing vaper with creepy crawlers, bugs, and insects- come out along with the demons of the girl in a wispy diaphanous hooded ghost, fighting the death- scream ear pricing, and the world shook- yet in death she took a soul down with her, it was his.

(Later on, that day talking with Emmah and the girls at the table.)

‘It’s just like you running a moment thinking about the past and

dwelling on it, it’s what you want to think that you have created in your mind, about things and not knowing the truths- just what is indirect, it’s what you want to believe and not know- and that is stopping you from what could have been wonderful. And that is why a lot of my old-time, interests did not work with me they did not see me- Just like making love to him after he found out the truth about me was to him like the perfect kiss he could have… and the right fight to him, and me you understand?’

Not at all they were shaking their head at her as if she had lost what

was left of her mind. ‘Well, there at least you have her thoughts, girls,’ Dariez said in a slurred voice, after being well drunk off magical potions- to get the demons out. And said was Naddalin forgiveness to her about the events of the day, she understood that her mind was not her own at the time.

That night Black dead body was taken away by twenty members of the- Magical Law Administration in a carriage along with fifty others in a funeral procession to the graveyard of those that past for a final time- to pass to the leaves of hell below- to be licked by the flams of fire and heat.

‘He acutely gets the first-class serve,’ some the townsfolks said under their breath, grudgingly and disgracing him to the tune of voices, that they were using to dishonor him. ‘It’s a way to be remembered.’ Said one elderly gentleman, nevertheless, I- Naddalin, think was a comfort to the poor older elders- and the parents of the children that have lost their lives to Black’s within the town, that has never- ever been the same since the massacre- yet little do they know the truth. The girls look on seeing him being pulled into the sunset, feeling the same as she in their thoughts, saying goodbye for the

last time, in that brief time he had become part of them that would last within them for years to come.

-And-

Madam Rosette lets out a long sigh.

And is it true she was mad, Minerva, and was a snitch- and was also taken too with him today within the procession, for the tallest tower of the castle? It is comical to me nobody knew here either, only for what she was known for doing, it made me think back and wonder if this was right or wrong to do to a child. She was possessed- by

them- and you know who- her. And another death at the behest of her doing and her girls- yet nothing is said about it other than that girls were to blame for it all.

-Then-

And, I wish I could say that she- was, said Harlan hoarsely. And I certainly believe she master's defeat with her crazy her for a while, and well cool off, despite the fact and then well start it all back up again- like always said Naddalin with the hate and all- that is what she does, starts crap and then get scared goes into hiding and then lets dye down for a while- for us to

feel safe and then starts it back up again; that is the joy of it for her- you know who… she and her girls.

‘She is the- murder then?’

Naddalin- ‘Yes and know you would have to prove that- and good luck.’

And all those nonmagic people were the- accomplishment of a confronted and desperate man revenge- cruel… pointless. Yet, I met Black on my last scrutiny of Dizeryland, and he said it was over you- and Nevaeh, and some who you were both linked in he is

going nuts on them- or something like that.

And You know, ladies, if you are dining with the- principal, we would better head back up to the- castle.

(Dinner)

Nothing but the low light of lanterns- glowing young faces, you know, most of the kids do not you, there sit muttering to themselves in the- dark about all this; there is no sense in them… being here in the first place, I mean they are just kids what could they have done, nothing compared to him for an instant. Yet

there here in this underworld wasteland that is so dark and mysterious, yet magical and wonderfully beautiful at the same time,it iss them like always that rune everything. This was said over conversations with the group of girls.

‘Like- I was shocked at how normal Black seemed when he hugged me it was for real, you know…’ Said Naddalin. ‘He was with her it felt like… said the one, that was coming around to understanding.’ It was unnerving, he- spoke quite sensibly to me.

You would have thought he- was merely tired- by his look know he

was exhausted over them playing with his mind and heart. It was asked if I had finished with my newspaper- so they could see the stories- I thought, cool as you please, Emmah said, she- missed doing the- mind-bender in the back, she had enough of the headlines- she dove into them frantically, doing one right after another. Yes, I was almost astounded at how negligible effect the- dementors and all and everything seemed to be having on her- and the voices that played in her head too was not getting her down.

She- was one of the- most heavily safeguarded in the- place, by

others how loved with her leaves of powers and smarts within the type of angel she is, you know, she did not need them playing with her mind she had the power to stop them- she just needs to believe that she could, like me also, that part of their plain to wearing you down, so you do not have the straight to fight back. Dementors outside the door day and night- sucking the thoughts right out of your head- for them- for them to use agents you- me and her over there too.

‘What their problem?’

‘I- we- you and me- we don’t know?’

-And-

‘But what do you think he’s broken out to do?’ And said Madam, she was sitting down the ways from the girls.

‘What Is a Paranormal Spirit Attachment?’ I have read about this in the library's restricted section of dark magic, Said Karly.

‘It was to an ad in him killing one part of her soul, I think- that she spit lay within the objects like the crystal ball, it helps kill her seeing her precious children fail, in not getting or keep what they want- or wanted, In

these objects, she has made them, and herself the most powerful one of us could ever be- by stilling and taking- and not caring if she is slaughtering someone's babies doing it, this is what she has made for herself to last for eternity- lasting power within objects, along with keeping her kids locked in theirs as well, that's was what it was all about- 'she was dumb and I knew more.' Said Naddalin, back all jittery.

Professor Rosette… 'Karly you should not be looking into those books in there… end up with two heads or something, just by reading something

that you and I both would not understand, or know how to fix.'

'Well anyways I have this book saying- what she did, how she did it, and why she did, it's her story- take it.'

Naddalin opened the book reluctantly, and before her eyes, the pages all went blank. Odd it only was left for your eyes to see, I wonder why?

Karly- I have a thought… and that is all she said skipping off down the hall, with the large tattered brown leather-bound book that looked way to odd and big for her small body, that was under her arm, the book was even

starting to pull on her long blue hair by the pages grabbing at her, being nasty to her, she said must keep this thing locked up. (There is a big lock that needs a skeleton key on around it with a ribbon holding the evil inside.) Odd she said- to Naddalin, and I had the key- as a necklace for years… and did not know why till now… 'they want you to know- she said back, to - PROVE IT!'

Just like us and how we the dead jump into the living for life, overseeing what we missed.

'And Good gracious,' Martita, said, 'I remember that happing to me when I was a child and now, I doing to

it to children, it scares me, I don't want to think that Lilly is trying to join You-Know- Who is she-?'

'She did, the one I's could always trust has gone bad.' The girls all shook their heads uneasily.

-And-

'Also, I feel like you in daresay that is there- ultimate plan,' said instructor Harlan ambiguously. And But we hope to catch them in the act of her controlling her long before that, to see if it here feeling this way to me or them making her feel that way. I must say, You- Know- Who- her and her girls

alone and friendless is one thing… at this point, nobody likes them yet there still afraid, of them. So-o giving her back to them as her most devoted servant, in the cards, as she lays them all out for them to see in her reading- the cards jump- leap and daces, out of her hand in moments of magical performances. At this point, I have my own set made to my liking and artwork approved. THE DEVIL card says it all to me.

And I shudder to think how quickly she will rise again…

-Then-

There was a small chunk of glass on the heavy handcrafted wood table in front of me and them, and well us- it started glowing, shacking, and moving about as if possessed. Look, girls, it is Alissa Amsel the badass bully of the school that took Neveah lovers away- look now girls she all-powerful. Overcome it was- it was- it was the last fragment of Alissa Amsel's life and excrescences. Someone had set down their glass down to see this shard fight for it the last sniffle of life, and Emmah watched it like a bad puppy, with her, rolled up newspaper, (saying bad- bad,) which then led into Naddalin- smashing

it down to dust with her flats school girl shoe from her left foot. And the maliciously evil girl was dead never-ever to be again in any lives!

One by one, the- pairs of feet in front of Naddalin took the- weight of their owners once more, all minds were back to where they should be by their magical contacts- as the Bureau of magic knows them to be; everything was back in order, that is when all the teacher and professors got up and walked down the lengths of tables after the fest- of commencement ceremonies took places after the death marches.

They all march down the middle all them in their elegant robes swung into sight, for all the students still sitting there in their uniforms, an order has been reclaimed; to the school and castle and Madam Rosette's glittering shekels disappeared behind the- bar… were she orders a drink and said- 'that is the last time we shall be dealing with them for a while.'

Yet Naddalin sat in the background next to the fireplace sitting on the large rock hearth- looking around all suspicious, think it was too early to celebrate. The girl's stat to get up from their tables, looking at them

you can see three with wings opened again for a fight, there was another flurry of snow outside, making the perfect backdrop for them to start to fly in this world.

Just like that the heavy wood doors flew open, with a gush and rush of air blowing the hair back on most of the girls, yet that did not stop the children from rushing for the door in flight as they all took off for the outside- it was the time of altering secession, as well- flares were covering the graveyard, the castle grounds, and the homes within the many villages; of this land that was so otherworldly, that

it’s hard to comprehend if you’re not one of us that has fallen, with a large squall and swell arrived the winter storm, ending a year, it looked as if they all disappeared, as they fly off into the distances, come back to their homes- for the break.

‘Just in time she said for us all to go home,’ said Naddalin.

As she looked around for the last time and slow strolled out the door, saying fitting to them, the party is over now. It is their party is it not? Hum- she sighed, saying this is their time for the brake too- by the time we are all back there will be another round for us,

more me than any of them, yet- well that my life. She was murmuring like a crazy girl, as she walked slowly into the deepening snowdrifts, not caring that she could fly, she just wanted to remember what it was like to walk- away from her problems.

Jinger’s And Emmah’s faces appeared under as the train steam ever so slowly- with the beam of light glowing a soft yellow- tracks grounding as if scream in the pain of the brakes- and large red wheels- the cowcatcher looking as if it was going to nip their uncover school girl legs, cold and raw from the air, and flats style unfarmed

shoe they were all wearing, the train was tumbling in a rhythm as it was pulling into the station for them to go back home, even if not a long trip in real-time, it felt like it was going to be on their time. book- bags field with overdue homework- and note hanging out about- many spells, potions, and all things dark and magical, and let us not forget flying, and a new set of cards given, to them by their best friend in their world Naddalin- that was her Holiday gift to them.

‘Don’t ya just hate it when they give homework over Christmas break?’ Said Emmah in sitting now by moving

one of the old benches to face backward, to face the other girls. ‘Um- like- look at the overelaborate metalwork on these things god… only you would notice something like that- there really old and made well- aren’t they, like look at this woodworking and these lights- and red velvet covered sets.’ she all so said.

They were both staring at her, lost for words, of her being taken back by what was inside, and them more on what was happen out the foggy windows.

Bye, Neville! She called to us, then one by one there was going home-

to their stations- and their homes on Earth.

Naddalin made her way along with the- narrow channel cover into the stone that is so tight that only one person can walk through at a time- sometimes needing to sidestep, though jagged rock faces, damp and musty, a passageway called Hayvannah's channel within the castle she walks human skulls littering the walls- of years past, holding a lantern, and then into it leads out to parts of the villages where there is a small shop. She then keeps walking onward till she found an inn where she planned to spend her

time off, it was vacant- and eerie, could and all occupations about gone for the Holidays. She then clicked her fingers, a fire burst into life in the- great fireplace within her large room- that she rented out, and she- bowed herself into her warm cozy bed, and soft sheets- and sleep for what would be two days in Earth time- she was just that played out from the voice in her head and others playing with her emotions- that being alone and quiet was almost defying- with the ringing in her ears of nothingness.

When Naddalin finally woke up from her slumber, she sits down in one

of the Victorian chases in her room, by the- fire, she began to replay all the memories of the past weeks in her mind, and already it was playing her out in new leaves of fatigue that she never felt before, and then she went to lie down more, and sleep- saying along with thinking in many ways saying the same thing of- ‘I can’t do this’ in foolish mumbles of incoherencies.

Naddalin did not have a noticeably clear idea of how she- had managed to get back into the tunnel in the first place, yet she did- she had this idea in her mind for some time to come here a place where she knew that

nobody knew where she was, and that was simply fine with her. A small-town hotel and first-class service, where she could just relax and reflect… it was an escape from the girl's room in the turret of the castle.

She was thinking about a cousin that she played with some when she was a child that also was forbidden, over the fact that she was in love with him, it was wrong, yet she never let go of think about what could have been if they would have been left be, even if… Is Love- love know? Blood is blood- even if- she thought- even if… this or

that- it does not matter how it is in the past- is it not?

She was thinking far too much about things, things like the end… and of all ends- ‘Death well squeeze your mind, creep in and play and in far too long, and stay even if you don’t want it too, death well lingers and pounder, and drain you of all wonder, it with fiddle with your brain, like taking blood from the veins- ‘till it kills you.’ She thought.

I said her mafia would never get me, and that is what it is, and was- and what is going to say being; I also said that she would never- ever get me,

never- ever- ever never… yet she did- she did- and sad to say, like- I do not think I care anymore. All I have are my lost thoughts of questions that lead to more questions of wonder and ponder of the questions why, and that leads to more inquiries of why? She thought.

~*~

She thought more- and more- ‘till her mind was at a stroke.

And into the- castle once more she went.

All she knew- was that she- return after her trip to find herself and seemed to take no time at all in caring

for her on losses- her mind concern- about nothing but the past and all the days lost and that she; hardly noticed what she- was doing- did not seem to make any scene… even if the only ones looking were the otherworldly animals around her, because her head was still pounding with the- conversation she- had just heard.

She pondered- they why of it all… why had nobody ever told her? Duerre, McDermott, Mr. Railie, Cornelius Harlan… why hadn't anyone ever mentioned the- fact that Naddalin's parents had died because- their best friend had deceived them?

Jinger And Emmah watched Naddalin nervously all through dinner, not daring to talk about what they had overheard, because- Serafina was sitting close by them.

When they went upstairs to the- packed public room, it was to find, Freeanna and Katy had set off half a dozen or more Fertilizer bombs in a fit of end-of-term high spirits.

Naddalin, who did not want Freeanna and Katy asking her questions about if she had reached the Claepsiara- yet of, the Skoufyceol of Wizardry or not, sneaked quietly up to

the- empty student house and headed straight for the bedside dresser.

She- pushed the books aside from her life not even think that she had everything in black and white, and then quickly found what she- was looking for.

At once, and at that moment at that time: she had found it- the leather-bound photo album- McDermott had given her two years ago, which was full of wizard pictures and all things magical. Like her life as both fallen dark and holy white angel- and then even further back to when she was a

child with her daddy; and her human life.

She- sat down on the bed, drew the- curtains around her that were hanging from the canopy that was around her, and started turning the- pages, searching, until… she found all the memories that she had lost within her mine- like an old backup hard drive; she planned for this moment and knew it was going to happen she could foresee it a long time ago; she was horrified loss of her mind- yet relieved that she had a plan like always; she was not yet, defeated- by her and her girls.

She- stopped on a picture of her own' wedding day- and then was looking for her parents- day as well and then she recalled that they were never married, even more terrified- she became- over her loss of memories- after the crystal ball broke, thinking her mind was finally gone- and given up to them- unwillingly.

There was her daddy waving up at her- she could see the photo yet that was all that was there the movement of her thoughts like films were gone, beaming, she- untidy her black hair Naddalin had inherited standing up in all instructions- not

having any more wit in her mind then they said- she had when she was just a little girl, by what they had made her become, back in elementary school- the mind of 2nd grader- she lost the thought of reading and was like starting over.

There was her mother, alight with happiness, arm in arm with the dad. And there… that must be her. There the best man… Naddalin had never given her a thought before.

If she- had not known it was the- same pergirl, she- would never- ever have guessed it was Black in the old photograph, that was holding her.

The face was not sunken and deceived to dust before her eyes, but handsome thoughts yet they were, full of laughter- lost in her mind like she was the day she passed the first time.

Had she- already been working for Ava when the picture had been taken? Was she, already planning the deaths of her, two people next; the closest to her- she wondered, yet it was muddy? The- dormitory door opened- and the lights went out.

Did she- realize she- was facing twelve years in Dizeryland, twelve years that would make her unrecognizable? Or has the twelve

years already past she did not know she was lost in her on the mind and did not have one left- for the taking- she was broken- like the shards of glass- with her memories.

Naddalin slammed the- album shut- the tears staining the pages, reached over, and stuffed it back into the dresser, and took off her robe, and glasses and got into bed, making sure the- long curtains were hiding her from view.

Lost in her dreams- the- dementors do not affect her- she was still strong in the subconscious she sits in a cold and damp cell- time has

passed yet not sure when- where and why, not even understanding how or why she is there…

Naddalin thought- and thought more, staring at her- hand- increasingly more, and more that were scared trying to remember her life, laughing face- tears streaming- lost in insanity. She got me she screamed- and the crows fly wildly, that was right above her oven cell that was exposed to the elements- and had no heat and lights.

Jaylynn- ‘I hear my mom screaming and there is nothing- I can do nor do I need to or want to. We all can hear her screams- like a haunted

train whistle of the past- in a screech that is so ear piercing that it's deafening- to the loved ones that were still link mentally with her even if they did not want to be.'

The next day- and what is going to happen to Naddalin? Said Jinger's, like smooth- Bella- like voice yet with uncertainty. She- heard Jinger leave again, and rolled over on the back, her eyes wide open.

But Naddalin lay still, pretending to be asleep- as the guard was screaming above her jail cell that he would cut her head off and no one would care if she did not shut up, the

blade was gleaning in the moonlight his breath was making a stream of heated vaper ice crystals.

A hatred such that she had never known before was pouring through Naddalin mind as if the knife went into her brain between the eyes. (And it did- after all, she would not die… even if…)

Just a thought and after one at that I knew the guard worked for her… I knew.

She- could see Black laughing at her through the- darkness- a spirit, as though somebody had pasted the-

moving picture of from the album over her eyes and face- and tattooed the word retard on her forehead- (And it did- after all, she was sold to them… even if… she was fallen she was noting.)

She- watched, as though somebody was playing her a piece of film, Trirus Black blasting through her mind was things that she had forgotten about for years. (A child she played with who resembled Neville) into them, moment at once just shattered into a thousand pieces- lost she could not think of who it was.

She- could overhear… (though having no inkling or clue what Black's voice might sound like) a low, excited murmur.

My Lord… It has happened she has made me their Secret- Keeper- come out of me thought there world out of my mouth and reveal themselves- she alleged then, at that time it started the harassment within her mind- that was not in her control, taunting her to have a nervous breakdown- And then came another voice, it was them…

The girls and you know who- her- she is standing over her tall and towering yet again- if only in her mind,

something she thought she would never take over yet did- more powerful than ever and Naddalin- she is nothing but again a week a little child in her wrath of shamelessness- asking for her forgiveness- for being blameless laughing herself piercingly- yet not her own if was you know who's evil snicker- and the cackles of the sisters…

The- same laugh that Naddalin heard inside, yet now coming out of her- she had taken over- and dementors drew near… and did as she said- she was the most powerful, yet again.

And Naddalin, you- you look awful, lost like a child that is re- traded-

that cannot read-write or even think for herself.

‘Awh- baby wants to cry?’ The girls say…

This was the comment she had to hear without consent to them, her mind, body, and soul were sold to them… or face the fury- of final death by those that would help her.

-And-

(Then just like that it was all over-and she saw a light glow and someone saved her for the hell that she was in, a girl in white with wings.)

But who was it?

Who…?

Naddalin had not gotten to sleep until daybreak. She- had awoken to find the- dormitory dressed, deserted, and gone down the- spiral staircase to a common room that was empty except for Jinger, who was eating a Peppermint candy massaging the other girls that she was back- even if not full yet, And Emmah, who had spread her homework over three tables- was more involved in that then saying hey- even if she was not trying to be self-absorbed.

And like- where is everyone? Said Naddalin.

Gone, she said! It is the first day of the- holidays, remember?

‘Of this year-?’ She stated, the date- not understanding, that 6 years have gone by- ‘like a shot of tequila and a good butt-kicking.’

And said Jinger, watching Naddalin closely. And it is near- dinner time; I was going to come and wake you up in a minute- are you feeling up to eating with us today and not being feed in bed?

-And-

Naddalin slumped into a chair next to the- fire as if her personality

were still there even if she was not physically. The snow was still falling outside the- large ornate arched windows, that were stained glass- and frosted by the cold, and were glowing a tint of yellow due to the warmth of the fire- that made her feel as if she were not dead inside- even if she was.

Cookies were spread- out for all in front of them- behind was the fire like an underneath was a large, ginger rug matching the medieval gothic feel of the castle.

And you do not look well, you know, and Emmah said, peering anxiously into her face- you should lay

down. ‘And I’m fine, good all I do is sleep any more I going to get fat also-' said Naddalin.

‘Naddalin,’ listen, and said Emmah, exchanging a look with Jinger, and you must be upset about what we heard yesterday. But the- thing is, you must not go doing anything stupid.

-And-

And- like what? At once said Naddalin.

And- like trying to go after Black, and said Jinger sharply- who was brought back to the life you know. By the healing touch- of the dark lord-

seeing into his mind and life's story just like yours- that is was why- you were saved too- he is and understand lord- no? And he takes care of his children.

Naddalin could tell she had rehearsed the tête- à- tête while she- had been asleep- she knew there was talk going on about her. She- did not say anything- she did not care- or feel there was a point in doing So-o.

'I don't think I will ever be who I was before…' She said.

'And you won't, will you, Naddalin? and said Emmah.'

'Yet, you are alive no…?'

‘Like- after all they did put you through an abyss- or a hell that most if not all here have ever seen or heard of! Tortured until you were like in a petrified of decay.’ Emmah alleged.

‘And because, Black’s not worth dying for, and said Jinger, they said they needed to say you even if there was a wrath to face regardless- that we girls all love you more than eternal life, and Black was found innocent of you- also- all is good don’t you see.’

Naddalin looked at them, like someone that had a stroke- or was not able to move their body full to smile.

They did not seem to understand at all, why she was so distraught. Yet, Dariez, looking over at all of them next to the fire- she felt as if she were the blame for everything, even if she had still did not apologize.

And- did you know what I see- every time a dementor gets too near me- I see her face laughing insanely in my ripping thought my face as if it wants to come out of mine? In addition to that, Jinger and Emmah shook their heads, looking apprehensively.

Also, I can hear my mom screaming- she is not my mother, she was the girl mother in-which I took

over her mind, body, and soul- and to have a body to linger in… yet she and I have become close as if I were her girl- in a way I am- half her still… a soul is broken in too many minds and bodies.

…And pleading with Ava, saying that she has won, do you have to keep going.

Naddalin- And if you have heard your Mom screaming like that, about to be killed, you would not forget it in a hurry- I also live with those memories, I live with nothing but horrifying bad memories. Not just my own, the ones- I must share over her wanting me too; this is just payback of

me being a baby about my own life- like a sick twisted joke the God's have played on me when I was a teen girl… God's lesson learned- and why I turn my back on a God and all God's. And for not understanding why someone that was all ways good, and did the right thing- like would be tortured- as I was- in all existences. Yet, this Lord gets me, and I get him- even if I do not feel the same about everything, and I must be thankful for life given back to me for a devil- such as he.

And if you found out someone who was supposed to be a friend of yours betrayed you and sent Ava after

you… you would feel dead inside too- as I do.

-And-

Besides, there is nothing you can do!

And said Emmah, looking stricken. And the- dementors will catch Black and she will go back to Dizeryland and serve her right! Said Alyssa who was still there taunting her, the only one that was not there… at Dizeryland- even if they just got off with a reprimand and are going to be out in the week.

- Then-

Portion

And you heard what Harlan said then anyway. Black is not affected by Dizeryland jail like normal people are- like us, he is wild and foolish, irrational, thoughtless at times for the ones he cares about- when it comes to his life and others- other than his own. It is not a punishment for him- it is just whatever- and more of the same- in a life that will not end, to him he is what he hates the most an idealized fake hero- to some and adversary to others.

-And-

So-o, what are you saying?

Then said Jinger, looking very tense. ‘And do they still want to- kill Black or something-'

‘…And have him on final death row?’ The girls unanimously asked these questions in the same whys, yet different terms of speech.

‘…Besides and do not be silly, the only ones that need to die a final death here is them…’ Naddalin squeaked out in a shrill voice.

Then said Emmah in a bizarre voice. And Naddalin does not want to kill anyone, do you, Naddalin?

‘No! - I have no enemies here…’

In addition to that, Naddalin did not answer the if’s… about it or not- for she did not know any more the why is of life or death or not and the because… even- she was done- talking to those that did not see it her way- and was too tired to give explanations.

She- did not know what she- wanted to do. All she- knew was that the- idea of doing nothing, while the mother and the girls were at freedom- in a week or two, was- more than she- could stand.

Hi- this young sweet little girl said with blond locks and big blue eyes batting- I am Mallerie, I have been assigned to you… as your aid.

‘Awh…’ she said sound like less than moved.

(Though- even here they make me out to be SPED- mm- mm- hmm.)

And Mallerie knows, and she- said abruptly- and she is your bodyguard- here to look out for you have nothing here at the school to have anxiety about- you are safe.

She was holding my hand as if I were more than gifted now…

Sweet…

yah- no…

And remember what she- said to me in Potions?

She said- that she was looking for one to make me feel new again.

I then thought- ‘hum- maybe I like this child.’

‘If it were me, I’d hunt her down myself… I’d want revenge, said the after their first class together.’

-And-

And you are going to take Mallerie’s advice instead of ours? And

said Jinger furiously, you are going to trust her with your life, after knowing that is fragile now, and this could be the last time you have a life to live… said Jinger and Emma even more angrily. Like we said you should be happy with what you have not trusted some girl- you just met last night- with drinks she makes in a urinal experimentally- like as if sipping from a water fountain. Like- like- um- you could end up looking like two-headed extremely angry dog, that we could name ‘Fuffie,’ said Emma.

‘If… …If I have to live like this… I don’t want to; it’s worth it to me.’ Naddalin said.

‘Listen… to us girl, and don’t be dumb…’

Therefore I doing it, I am sick of being called dumb, so I might as well live up to my image- right girls?

Do you know what Jettigrew’s mother got back after she and those girls were had finished with her? A girl like you- that was still their child, yet she did what you wanted to do, and she is out there in the graveyard for the last time, with the cows dumbing shit

on her stone to remember is that what you want? Besides not even a spring flower pops up for her for being dumb.

Jettigrew's finger was on the brown boxes, just printed the first copies of all the girl's stories of their lives, no longer just pages being spewed out of the charming Typewriter, places in large piles, of stacks of paper. My dad told me- that I would be getting the first copies… Look this one is called the Pretender of Secrets! First Class mail girls, open the boxes! She said, all excited.

'That was the- biggest bit of her- a life not yet said, they could find-

out about me now,’ said Naddalin- ‘like this all was meant to be confidential.’

‘Ladies… please- forgive her she is cranky and paranoid,’ said the professor.

I thought you would be thrilled- she said, along with saying- after all the work was done for you in all of these- and the editing too, and have you not done this before? She said razing an eyebrow, of inquisitorial.

It said here… that magical world thinks that she- you know who- is a madwoman- the sister's mother, and it says here they think Naddalin, she is

dangerous to herself and others… now, this is proving it said Naddalin more making more controversy for me too- fix- fix- fix?

-And-

‘Hey look…’ said the one professor girls, that read… too bad that it is not in their studies… ‘gossip- nonetheless,’ she wrinkled up her nose.

And Mallerie’s dad must have told her, said Naddalin, ignoring Jinger, that I want to see what this all said. So, she played into having them published.

‘Sweet thank you- but you shouldn’t have…’ Said Naddalin. Why is

my name on the covers- I did not write these?

‘In a way you did… you started this project; you can keep it going- right?’ At that moment she grabs her shoulders.

‘If… …you say- So-o.’ She said looking up into her eyes, with the joy of doing this for her lost.

Emma- Besides, She- YOU- Naddalin- was right along- she was in Ava’s inner circle said another skipping to the end of the first book, spoiling it- all for everybody that want to find out on their own.

‘She…?’

‘Lily…’

-And-

Besides interjected Jinger angrily, saying- ‘the point here was, so we would not jump to conclusions, also actually read, and think for ourselves- besides not start a bunch of girls- fights over this all to read in privet, besides, have our thoughts.’

A moment or two later she whispered ‘…THANKS!’ in her ear.

‘Also, like- just say her name, will you? It not like they will burn you

for witchcraft!’ said one of them yelling it from the back of the room.

‘They might…?’ Alleged-Naddalin.

I have a question- ‘yes child…?’ why did you become a new name, in the book- and whom were you before?

‘So-o, it's true your: NEVAEH?’

‘I would say, honey- that you need to start from the beginnings- this does not book one- I’ll give you a hint, and read between the lines of a story like mine to find out, who I am and not what they say I am…’

…?...

‘The girl just looks dumbfound and walked away muttering, I UNDERSTAND SHE’S AFRAID- even if… it likes in black and white, even then it all in how you want to read it and take it… whatever it is… I don’t know… if I care to know it… or about it all.’

And - so obviously, the- Malleries knew Lily was working for Ava… or she would not want you to know to prove it!

‘Hush…’ one girl said in taunting way, or bullying- Naddalin, who was withering away by the moment.

-And-

‘Get a grip… girl… this is all in your head.’

Besides - Also Mallerie would love to see you blown into about a million pieces! I feel that you should not trust her… Said the one girl. She is just trying to blow this up for you all to make drama.

‘…Why she is not even part of the story…’ Whispers were coming from the back, saying that she should not even be here she was to goodie-goodie.

‘Do you think So-o?’ She said all fretfully.

See and all the girls in the room start to laugh. At Naddalin how was question everything- that was said in the room.

Mallerie’s just hoping you will get yourself killed before she- must play you at Claepsiara, that is if you are up to it by then, yet that is half a year away.

-Then-

And Naddalin, please, also said Emmah, her eyes now shining with tears, please be sensible, and think

about what you are doing to others, and not just about yourself, and them all the time, it is driving you insane.

Black did a terrible, terrible thing, but do not put yourself in danger, anymore for him saving you, just to save himself, it is what Black wants… Oh, Naddalin, you would be playing right into her hands if you went looking for her… with a sharp mind, and revenge in your still- and silent hart.

‘Your mom and dad wouldn’t want you to get hurt, would they, Naddalin?’

‘I don’t have parents… um- in a way- I do, yet I don’t- um- you would not understand… and it would take long for me to explain, don’t worry yourself about me I will be fine.’

They would never want you to go looking for her in the first place! She said.

‘I didn’t since you ask…’ was her reply.

-And-

And I will never know what they would have wanted, because thanks to Lily, I have never spoken to them, said Naddalin shortly- along with

Black, doing what he did, saved me kind of- and is killing me slowly also.

'If they wanted anything…' said- Emma, along with saying slightly after in the next breath- 'I would not worry yourself about it all, it's not worth it after all- is it?'

There was a silence in which stretched lavishly bending her nails and left hand down on to the books, her middle fingernail snapped under the stain.

(Lunch)

Naddalin looks through her food on her try- pulling out a slimy worm-

‘Are you going to eat that?’

‘I want not planning to…’ She said.

Jinger’s pocket quivered, she said-

Jinger- ‘I found this raven outside- fail out of her nest next to the tower, I going to keep her ‘till she big enough to fly.’

The bird chirps…

Naddalin- ‘I see it’s always good to help the defenseless.’

And Look, said Jinger, obviously casting around for a change of subject, and it is the- holidays! It is Christmas!

Let us - let us go up to our rooms now- and be with our roommates. Last visited for what well feel like ages- girls say your goodbyes!

-And-

‘Like this may be the last time, that some of you do- you never know.’ Said one of the professors.

‘…Oh… No…!’ Some of them making the most shocking faces they have ever in their lives. Said Emmah quickly.

Then Naddalin is not supposed to leave the- castle, Jinger- even if we are all gone?

- Besides-

Come on girls- she whispered- and all the girls heard Emma’s thoughts in their minds- of the way- and it was not good- not good.

(‘The thoughts that were shared in their brains… And- yes, let us go, and leave her to her thoughts, I can

see she is lost in them and wants to be left alone.')

And said Naddalin, sitting up, I can ask her how- come she- never mentioned Lily when she- told me all about my parents! Or why she wanted me brain- dead so bad.

Beyond the girls roll their eyes, and walk out the room thinking she is completely… mad.

-And-

Some time had passed… with further discussion of Trirus Black was not what Jinger had had in mind, and

that Naddalin was nowhere to be found.

Or we could have a game of fallen angel chest where all the pieces are different angles- and powers, on the train ride home… Emma- said discussed and hurriedly- to all the other girls we gotten to know.

Otherwise or checkers; Serafina left a set, and said ‘I bet I’ll bet yah!’

-And-

And no, let us visit with all the girls, for this light night we have and not fight said Emma, and then also said

Naddalin firmly, agreeing that she did not want to be the blame for them fighting among themselves- just over a book.

So, they got their fine clothes from their dormitories and set off through the- portrait hole- into the station- back to the real world, and their hometowns. On the train, the games start and they are extremely competitive. All the girls with their magical board games- in the competition were the pieces of the board come alive in front of their eyes.

Down through the- empty castle- Naddalin did her nightly walks,

and her seances in witchcraft contacting the dead- from her room, and out through the- oak front doors, to the one oak tree she brought back for her homeland and property for seedlings.

She made her way now flying down the- lawn, week yet making flight along with a shallow trench in the- glittering, powdery snow, her socks and the- hems of her glitter- almost gray and silvery sparkling- yet at times transparent- and translucent Robes was soaked completely and totally and freezing, yet she was able to fly ones

more. A moment of delight for her… in a time of sadness, and feeling alone.

Not even thinking rationally she- went into the forbidden forest looked as though it had been enchanted- with all that is dark creepy mysterious, each tree smattered with silver, and McDermott's Victorian cottage in white looked like an iced cake, she had her own home, not far away…

Jinger knocked, but there was no answer when she made her rounds little did Naddalin know- that she was teleporting back and forth to make sure that she did not do anything crazy,

foolish, and irrational, or only plain stupid- and she did…

‘Christ-' she did what I was afraid of… and she looks out and sees a- girl 100 feet up, flying wildly- at times, like- as if she going to snag the weathervanes on some the towers.

‘This girl is trying to see how many times she can test fate and die…’ Then in thought, she said- ‘she has to be out of her mind, with wondering why- yet, I am standing here looking at her asking the same very thing.’

‘Hum- nothing surprises me anymore…’ she modeled. Then in the

next thought- (Well so much for spending time with the girls on the train… playing games and having fun, I see here that I will be babysitting, I see… I see- yah, happy Christmas to me.) …She was clapping her hands; then and at that moment said Emmah, who was shivering under her robe when off into the star-filled moonlight of night after her. It was an odd night, unlike others there was a large crescent moon.

Jinger had her ear to the- door- and then crack it open slightly, just after getting her to come down and get inside take a bath and get ready for

bed, yet Naddalin is talking to the marrow, seeing if there were any writings of messages for the other side coming through- on what to do next.

The marrow of dishonesties in the girl's massive bathing room… and she is standing there in the nude, looking into it, in a trance… but showing perfectly, in a gray dimly lit room, with heavy steam- and candle everywhere. She was mumbling insanities… eyes rolling in the back of her head all you could see were the whites of the ball.

And- there is a weird noise, coming out of the body in places I do

not want to say… as if hell was going to break throw… her face was changing, into others, that were neither one of the bodies in-which she keeps.

The voices coming out of her mouth I knew it was HER, and that she was not crazy… yet me saying it would make me look crazy… in trying to prove it… that Naddalin was right, you can prove them to blame, there always blameless and find a way- out.

‘Naddalin she-' said…

‘Listen- come, come to bed it's time…’ She said over and over.

She turns to like, and the hunt of the woman ripped through her, the candles blow out with no warning, a child through her body of evil, a terror that she never felt before…

‘Is that Fang, I see?’ (She thought- and that thought was being shared if she liked it or not.) I will kill you- by clawing your eyes out- the possessed - Naddalin said, and feed on your eyeballs… for a snack. Leave…! And Jinger ran… fast than ever before in this life, she was given.

-And-

Emmah put her ears to the- door too… after seeing this girl running for what she said was her life into the girl's dorm- room, Emmah transported back to the castle, over what was called an emergency- of attempted final- homicide.

From inside low, throbbing moans, of a girl laying on the floor nude, that looked as if she was in a coma of dangerous unconsciousness as if the loss of all fallen- angel- azure unoxygenated blood.

'And- I think we'd better get someone?'

‘A doctor?’ She said.

‘More like a witch- doctor… to perform and exercise.’

‘…And that to- DON’T, STAND, THERE, GO- AND GET HELP!’ And said Jinger tensely.

And professor- McDermott- she may be able to get inside them- soul at this point, and end this!

And called- out for others that may be here, that can help even the ghosts, that haunt the halls.

Naddalin, thumping the floor in compulsions- door slammed and no one was there just them. Then what seemed

like an eternity- McDermott, and some other girls were there at her side? As Jinger was showing in a hologram what she saw in her mind played out for them to see before their eyes. Tombstones litter the front yard, black trees with curly branches that look as if they would seize at you. With a gray-blue, sky, in the background, hints of sinful lime- green are glowing around the- home, one light one in a cracked arch window, glowing in wicked.

-And-

I’m meeting Emmah Kizziah for what feels like the first time when I wake up a year or two has passed.’

Hayvannah raised her eyebrows, to me I do not know you either… yet I did, I was lost…

'You almost passed for the last time,' Hayvannah said.

Emmah said… 'Hi- you know me… even if you don't want to at times… ha- like- I have changed, yet not that much my hair is longer and an assorted color.'

'You're meeting Emmah Kizziah? Today?' the new girl asked, as she helps Naddalin up and out of her bed… for what seemed like a lifetime- of reliving a part- of the girl's life she

took over to hide inside a lingering soul.

‘Er… listen, do you want to come with us- girls are flying for the first time, before lunchtime- we know you like that? Said- Emmah.

‘Do you want to come with me?’

‘Yeah… well, she- asked me to, so I thought I would.’

‘She would-' you even said it wouldn’t matter if she did.’

‘Oh… well… that was nice of her.’

But then again, Hayvannah did not sound as though she would have- thought it was nice at all. On the- divergent, her manner was cold and suddenly, she would- looked rather unfriendly.

A few more minutes passed in total silence, Naddalin drinks her coffee so fast that she- would soon need a fresh cup, just to keep going- she seemed to be drinking increasingly- to feel as if she were not half-dead on the inside.

Beside them, Riley Davies and her girlfriend seemed glued together at the- lips.

Hayvannah’s hands were lying on the- table beside her coffee and Naddalin was feeling a mounting pressure to take hold of it after already drinking her cup of coffee.

‘Just do it,’ Naddalin- told herself, as a fount of circulated alarm and pleasure and excitement surged up inside her chest; just reach out and grab it- she thought. Emmah seemed even more clingy than before, the attack like she was living one day at a time with her as if it would be the list, she would spend with her ever.

Amazing, how much more difficult it was to extend her arm twelve

inches, and touch Emmah’s hands, feeling love, than it was to snatch, about her past, to her when she already could understand, then a speeding bat fly by and she caught it from midair… and its fangs bit into her flesh and started to suck out life from her body, where her precious blood.

But just as she- moved her hands forwards, Hayvannah took hers off the- table, thinks she could be a need in the unwanted hart thobe of lust and love with someone, she did not know- and to she liked boys.

Some of the girls just look, and smiled as Emmah was saying- to

Hayvannah- ‘you well- in time, like US girls…’ and she playfully winked at her.

She would- was now watching Riley Davies kissing her girlfriend with a mildly interested expression.

‘She- asked me out, you know,’ she’d- said in a quiet voice.’

A couple of weeks ago. ‘Riley, I turned her down, though.’

Naddalin, who had grabbed the- sugar cookies on the platter to excuse the sudden lunging movement across the- table, could not think why she would- and was telling her that she

was falling too. Yet she was… falling for a girl, all over again.

If she would- wished- she would- was sitting at the- next table being she- artily kissed by Riley Davies, why had she would- agreed to come out with her?

She- said nothing… Their scab threw another handful of confetti over them; counting down the new year- of their world, some of it landed in the- last cold dregs of coffee Naddalin had been about to drink, that was not hers.

‘I came in there with Lily last year,’ said Hayvannah.

In her- second or so it took for her to take in what she would- had said, Naddalin’s insides had become glacial.

She- could not believe she would- wanted to talk about Lily now, while kissing couples surrounded them and a cherub floated over their heads.

Hayvannah’s voice was high when she would- yet spoke again.

‘I’ve been meaning to ask you for ages… did Lily- like did she- ever in a chat mention me at all before she-died?’ I like this girl yet, only knew her by her last name; what was her name?

‘Why do you care-? It doesn't matter… now she was gone forever.’ One girl said, back that was kinda snotty… in a hast.

Well most of the girls, looked at her- like it was not nice, yet true.

If you say- that you think, you were falling for her we can see what we can do to bring her back to life?

‘You- a looking for a girlfriend?’ Emmah said, in a kiddish way.

‘I don't know if I am ready for a girlfriend?’ Said Hayvannah.

She was the- very last subject on earth Naddalin wanted to discuss, and least of all with Hayvannah.

‘Well no,’ she- said quietly. There was not time for her to say anything. Erm… so… did you… did you get to see a lot of others over the- holidays- or is she the one for you?

‘I just thought she was cute, that all.’

‘Like- boys never get it right… the last one I had called me a bitch, looking for a dinner plate also.’

‘Come to the dark side… as you can see, we’ve got cookies.’ Said Riley.

Well, support you-? And- the game moves one with the next move, her voice sounded falsely bright and cheery, saying- ‘there a girl out there for me I’m- sure here, I just need to finder she or she finds me, I not looking.’

To Naddalin’s horror, she- saw that her eyes were swimming with tears again, just as they had been after the- last meeting before Christmas, back before her change as some call it.

Everyone was contented, yet not truly fully happy- ‘life is life is not…?’ Said Naddalin, along with saying moments after in a murmur- and

with the shakes, of some that were deceased- in the real world, with something like Parkinson's- and dementia…

'…You can get close- yet never fully there- in the life of happiness and or keep it- just like them and/or of things.'

Naddalin- 'Look,' she- said desperately, leaning in so that nobody else could overhear,' let us not talk about Lily right now… let us talk about something else, 'Oh like you and Emmah and the PDA'n you to have been- doing.'

Portion

But she was quite the- wrong thing to say about.

‘I thought,’ after saying, she’d- said, tears spattering down on to the- table,’

‘I thought you’d you would understand! I needed to talk about it, and that I was falling more than just what I am! Surely- you need to talk about it too!’

‘I mean, you saw it happen, didn’t you?’ I will not want to talk about it said Naddalin, my mind has had enough.

Everything was going nightmarishly wrong; Riley Davies's girlfriend had even unglued herself to look round at Hayvannah crying.

'Well I have talked about it,' Naddalin said in a mumble,' to Jinger And Emmah, but and to the new girl now…'

'She is not to be trusted don't fall in love with that…'

Like you would know?

'I know you better than you think- a little girl, I was also…'

'I am not you…' She said.

‘Then do it…’ Said Naddalin.

‘Oh, you’ll talk to Emmah Kizziah! Also, about this you find someone here that you love, and I know her >This Girl< here she will help- you do So-o.’

She would- said shrilly, her face was now shining with tears- that sparkled in the light like glass shards.

Several more kissing couples broke apart to stare, at the sight of the girl that was crying what looked to be glass crystals, and so hurt over lust- and love, and what she could not have-

that was feeling like her old life of forbidden.'

'Um- maybe it would be best if we just… paid for this food… cram it, and you went and met up with Emmah Kizziah like you noticeably wanted to!'

'And…, (sniffle) and…, (sniffle) and…, (sniffle) … I'll well go to my room, rot, and cry, like a little girl that I am.'

'But you see none of these girls will not talk to me!' she said walking down the halls, of the schools.

Naddalin stared at them, utterly bewildered, as she would-

seized a frilly napkin and dabbed at her shining face with it- cutting her face and the blue azure color ran like blood from the gashes and was making the glassy tears look as if their shards of Arctic glacier ice.

‘Hayvannah…?’ She- said weakly, wishing Riley would seize her girlfriend and start kissing her again to stop her ogling at her and Emmah.

‘Go on, leave!’ she’d- said, now crying into the- napkin.’

I do not know why you asked me out in the- first place… if it was not for real… Naddalin said do not feel bad,

I have to say here to… not everyone wants me here, and it is going to be the same for you- for you do not like them. ‘That’s- a life- even in the afterlife.’’

‘Like if you’re going to make arrangements to meet other girls right after me… staying here in my room you can save it…’ ‘How many are you meeting after Emmah? Like… you have been through a lot?’ Why can’t you keep them?

‘That was compounded questions… well…?’

‘I will say with you- if you like…? (She just looked up at her

blushingly,) I must! I don't have to save anything to a child like you, after all, you have to respect me, and that is not you thought to have; but if you must know it was over trust... and falling out of love with them- or the other way around.'

'It's not like that!' Said Naddalin, and she- was so relieved at finally understanding what she would-was... yet annoyed about that too, she-laughed, and the tears stopped, which she- realized a split second too late was also a mistake- to start doing in the first place.

Hayvannah sprang to the feet at that moment. The- whole team was quiet and everybody was watching them now, even if they were on the train ride back home half of their mind, was looking tough to them on the other side and was looking at them talking to one another about their personal lives, though one side of their face and put one of those girls eyes, as if they were there too- they could see, hear, and feel it all.

I will see you around, she would- said to the girl, that was been nasty dramatically harsh, and hiccoughing slightly Naddalin- dashed

to the- door, wrenched it open and hurried down the halls and long corridors out the first door off into the- pouring rain, to have a moment alone, even if she is never.

‘Naddalin!’ Hayvannah called after she left, but the- door had already swung shut behind her, looking them apart, and she was not able to open without a scalation key… (that was always around her neck,) she was feeling better and worse about the mean things she said to her.

There was total silence within the- café Hayvannah walk to town in the grays of colors and the flurries of

snow all around, looking for her, when everyone eyes were on her over not liking what she said to Naddalin after all this was the girl that said it was okay for her to be here and took her out a pure hell.

Naddalin- She- threw a Galleon of milk down, at the town market, on to the- table, a golden longstanding register was all she could see, not even her eyes at this point would pick over, the counter, she shook pink confetti out of the hair; from it littering the areas- outside…

Just before she walked into the store, the clocks- like the one that was

just like the one from her hometown, with the big was a glowing face was making a showed with hand on the hour…

That ticked- talked down, the new year- she saw a girl getting wind blows down the pathway; she did not see Naddalin, behind her as she followed Hayvannah, as she went out of the- door.

It was snowing hard now and she would- not have even noticed her, that she was nowhere to be seen; even if she did not realize that she was walking right behind her. Getting ever so closer with every step.

She- simply did not understand what had happened; half an hour ago they had been getting along fine, and they were fighting.

‘Lady!’ She- muttered furiously, sloshing down she- the now knee-deep snow, felling the street with her hands in the pockets, to keep them from the cold and frostbite.’

What did she would- want to talk about Lily for, anyway?

Why does she- always want to drag up a subject that makes her act like a wild mare- that wants to buck off the rider?’

She- turned right and broke into an icy run, and within minutes she- was turning into the- doorway of the tree graveyards into the up to the pathway that leads to the bridge that leads up the school and castle, thousands of feet up, she knew that she could not fly over this even if she wanted too, yet another reason why she went to town, for an ointment for the feathers on her wings, to help them mend, and have them groomed, by trusted hands- by a man she has known for years, in what looks like a 1920s barbershop.

She knew the flight was risky, even if she did not fear final death at this point, it was not worth it when she real- at this point was contented to live.

Naddalin- she- knew she- was too early to meet Emmah, at this point, and was not ready to meet up with the one, that she was following behind, and she was already in the air making her flight a- crossed- a remarkable sight the gush to wind would knock you back- from the speed that she was able to capture- and the majesty was brilliant- as she would score- higher than an American Eagle.

After that, she went to a coffee shop- within the walls of the castle- on the 13th floor, but she- thought it there would be someone in there with whom she- could spend the- dominant time, of her night.

She- shook the wet hair out, that fall longer than her butt, her eyes needing rubbing she looked around, and yet again there was no one around, just a waiter.

Then moments have passed, then hours, night become day, she dozed off, just to wake up in nods to see McDermott was sitting alone in a corner; looking down- too, she did not

have anything to go home to So-o she stayed too.

‘Hi, McDermott!’ She- said, when she- had squeezed through the- crammed both, and pulled up a chair beside her.

McDermott jumped and looked down at Naddalin as though she- barely recognized her, EVEN IF HER FACE WAS INCHES FORM HERS.

Naddalin saw that she- had two fresh cuts on the faces and several new bruises, yet was feeling stronger and stronger on the inside- she was making a full recovery- she just needs everyone

out of her head and some time to be nothing but quiet.

‘Oh, it’s you, Naddalin,’ said McDermott.’ Yes, all right- ‘Yeah, I’m fine,’ lied Naddalin who was like 75% healthier than the day before; but, next to the battered and mournful- looking McDermott, she- felt she- did not have much to complain about, that was looking like rotting death, walking.’

‘Er- are you sure you're- OKAY?’

‘Me?’ said McDermott.’

‘Oh yes, I’m grand and still full of life, Naddalin, was grand with

excitement- saying, ‘I feel I will am a lot like you someday.’’

She- gazed into the- depths of the aquarium tankard- of fish-like creatures inside, which was the size of an of a room, that was in the on the one side of the room, and sighed, saying- ‘… and they think back home, that we came from that if the monkey was not bad enough.’

Portion

Naddalin did not know what to say to her, when she said, ‘I feel you will outlive me, your blood is far more

valuable than mine- and you are far more power than- me.'

They sat side by side in silence for a moment. Then McDermott said brusquely, 'In the same boat, yeh and me, ant' we, honey?'

'Er' said Naddalin, followed by saying- 'I suppose So-o.'

'Yeah… I have said it before… both outsiders, alike like- none of them will ever be fully you- even if they still,' said McDermott, nodding wisely.

'And both orphans inside you to make one with the strength of two, you become your more than them, and

most- even if… even if… yes… orphans- they are- that- odium, and you too but remember- why? Why… you have made it more than them- and have not fallen too them, it is a question of why- in the first place, that made you become whom you were meant to be- part of your story- to make there is, yet you are at the top, remember why- the true way.'

She- took a great swig from the mug- increased coffee- I need to keep going, she thought.

'Makes a difference, having a decent family,' she- said, back.

‘Yes, maybe So-o; yet I feel that you have always had one you just failed to notice, in your thoughts or feel as if you were not wanted.’

‘My dad was decent, I loved my Dad and lost him too young, my Mom was not, and the same for the second time around, Dad was decent, and now look what I did to him like the other it was all over me being in their life that their end too soon.’

‘If they had lived, life without me, or them interfering would- a bit different, eh?’

‘You can’t change a plan even you have said that in your own story- be proud of your story- in black and white- it’s best to remember that.’

‘Yeah… I'm spouse,’ said Naddalin cautiously.

McDermott seemed to be in a very strange mood, she thought yet motherly and that was nice when she never- ever really had that.

‘Family,’ said McDermott gloomily.’ Whatever yes say, the blood’s important… yet is not everything,’ She- wiped- saying ‘I have had the bodies of 4 girls before me, as I am now- I have a

life now- for around 4,000 years a trickle of it out of her eye, saying take them and see my memories, this may be the night, that I must say goodbye- forever, …I have seen more than one millennium, it is time to lay at rest- next to the other bones in the yard.'

'Ms. McDermott,' said Naddalin, unable to stop herself,' where are you getting all these injuries, on your hands and limes?'

'All those!' said Naddalin, pointing at McDermott's face, saying you are being eaten by the death- and part of death is time.

‘I not- okay, I am disintegrating like the blacked dart- that I am made of showing thought- over time, nothing lasts forever, soon if I choose not to lay at rest; I will become black dust blowing in the wind- with nothing left by to by sweep away in a dust pain.’

‘Eh?’ said McDermott, looking startled- at the look of the young girl carrying.’

‘Oh… that’s only normal bumps an’ bruises, Naddalin,’ said, wanting to think that, McDermott dismissively- said… ‘‘don’t be afraid of death,’ I was not, the first time, and I not going to be

this time …even if… this time is to burn, for a life of not wanting too.’’

She- drained the mug, set it back on the- table, booth… as Naddalin got to her feet.

‘I’ll be seeing’ yes, Naddalin… take care of now.’ Naddalin knew she would not be seeing her ever again.

And she- lumbered out of the- pub looking wretched, and disappeared into the- torrential blizzard, after walking, yet again all the corridors- for something to do, out in the weather for air, even if she was high up long a veranda of the castle.

Naddalin watched her go to the beyond that night, feeling miserable, as she tried not to look back, even if she had to stop- to defog the shop's window with her palm, to look at her one last time before walking on.

McDermott was unhappy and she- was hiding something, but she- seemed determined not to accept help. What was going on? But before Naddalin could think about it any further, she- heard a voice calling her name.

‘Naddalin! Naddalin, over there!’

Emmah was waving at her from the tower above- for her side of the- room and veranda, saying… ‘come inside and met me up here, instantly she was there, in a spell of teleport, Emmah was in her head and making her no if and or butts, to get inside, and be by her side.’

She- got up and made the way towards her through her- saying, ‘well you stand by me forever- and never leave me? I am scared, of being alone and the unknown.’ She said to Emmah in a strong hug, that would not break- away.

She- was still a few feet away when she- realized that Emmah was alone- too and feeling about the same in low.

She would- was sitting at the end of her bed with the- unlikeliest pair of slippers on her feet, that were so old they were crusty. ‘I can’t let them go…’ she said ‘there like part of me…’ she- could ever have imagined: a night without them just like her pillow- and blankie too.

Danna Lovegood was the same she had a stuffed pink bunny, and still sucked her middle and ring fingers as she sleeps- and it sounds inappropriate

at times. All girls- like us come with corks…

Rita Skeeter, a journalist on the- Star press and one of Emmah's least favorite people in-the-world, was on her way to get the story, about McDermott final passing, and I had nothing to say, yet I was the last to have said anything, like- why is always me, that gets the spotlight when I do not want it?

I thought you were with Hayvannah, I wasn't expecting you for another hour at least!' 'You're early!' Said Emmah, moving along to give her room to sit down for the interview.'

‘I’m- a-going to say this now- the shit…! …you put into this better make this one here, look good- she been through enough- or kick your ass to your head- got that.’

‘Hayvannah? - Who came back to see all the fuss, just for some moments before teleporting back with them on the train ride home with the others.’

Rita said at once- if they were having sex- and all that girl like them do, twisting around on her butt to stare avidly at Naddalin- Emmah did.’ Who was a loss of wards…?’

‘A girl… can be a friend to other girls here without you dating her right?’ That was said back…

Emmah- ‘And even if we are, that for us to care about not you… get to talk about why you're here or get lost.’ Hayvannah- in a rage!

‘It’s none of your business if Naddalin’s been with a hundred girls,’ Emmah told Rita coolly, this is not what this story is about after all.

‘So, you can put that away right now.’

‘This is about final memory and obituary- not my sex- life…’

Rita had been on the point of withdrawing a corrosive blue quill from her bag… to override the words, that are always type automatically.

Looking as though she'd- had been forced to swallow hard- Naddalin said- 'I don't care what you say in this paper' …and then she kissed Emmah on the lips just to make her happy, say whatever you want- both agreed at this point to get her away from them, and both were saying everything or anything she wanted to her, or she would not leave… 'till she got here story her way- she sat there for 3 hours- looking into Naddalin's eyes

spine-chillingly, she'd- snapped her bag shut again; saying- 'I think I have my story here.'

'What are you up to- girlie?'

Danna her friend, was saying come one we need to get back to the town, pressroom, I will walk with you I need some air anyways, the girls knew this was just a diversion- yet worked.

Naddalin asked, sitting down- after getting up to meet Danna saying- 'OMG thanks,' (in a whisper) and staring at Rita, walking away bouncing out the door with every footstep… uniform skirt fluttering…

Emmah- ‘yep,’ she said looking dazed, her eyes were crossed, Naddalin said, ‘well- well- well- this is going to be rich- no?’

‘Little Miss. Perfect was just about to tell me when you arrived- when you walked in a took my story away,’ said Rita, taken a large slurp of her drink, walking with Danna.’

Emmah- I suppose was allowed to talk for you to her, I- was right?’ She would- shot at her looking back with one brow up.

‘Yes, I suppose you are,’ said Naddalin said aloofly.

Unemployment did not suit Rita, so she shut up after the last threats of having her shity job.

Emmah's- her- hair that had once been set in elaborate curls now hung lank and unkempt around the face.

Naddalin- 'You are looking more like me every day- in the not caring…' and she touched her hair loose- curls, saying 'I still love yes.'

'Same back…'

'It's what on the inside that counts…right… he- he.'

The- crimson paint, hand on the light post matched the holiday feel, and the color of Rita two-inch nails- that was chipped, shorter and shorter with every bit she made, and there were a couple of false jewels missing from her ring to on her hand, her nerves were that bad, that she was even picking her scabs again.

She would- took another great gulp of her drink and said out of the- corner of her mouth,' Pretty girl, she is... Naddalin?'

'What you're saying this all over the fact that you like her- you have a piss- poor way of showing it.'

(We/us- Naddalin- and I, were) Looking into Danna's mind- she was doing everything she could to keep calm. ‘One more word about Naddalin’s and Emmah’s love life and the- deal is off, of helping keep this job, and that’s a promise,’ said Emmah irritably-

‘What deal?’ said Rita, wiping her mouth on the- back of the sleeve of her right hands.’

‘You haven’t mentioned a deal yet, Miss. Prissy, you just told me to turn up-and you had something in it for me.’

‘Yes, but you are taking it too far- and blowing it all out-a proportion…’

‘What’s that mean? …Out- a proportion…?’

‘So-o, this was a way to get to her, you never- ever read a card about me… is that it, God that’s low and creepy?’

Find someone who cares, why do not you?’

‘Oh, one of these days…’

‘Yes, yes, one of these days you will write more horrible stories about Naddalin and me- and others, I am sure

of this, yet you'll be doing it without a job, said Emmah indifferently- you're going to say shit about the wrong person- okay- you have been warned.' This is what was said in a letter to her boss, 3 or so days later.

She would- took a deep shuddering breath, I will am the one to kiss and love her- and her eyes glitter- as she graded both of her hand in a tight hold.

They have run plenty of horror stories about Naddalin this year without my help- she said- and I must do as they say,' said Rita, shooting a sideways look at her over her- top of

her glass, when she met up with her the next day over yet more coffee and adding in a rough whisper,' how has that made you feel, Naddalin…? Distraught…? Betrayed…? Misunderstood…?'

'It's all in the fact, that I want you!' she said sheepishly. Naddalin looked at her astonished and completely flabbergasted.

'She- feels angry, of course,' said Emmah in a hard, clear voice. She is not into you so back off.'

'For the reason that she told she- Martita for Magic she- truth and

she- Martita's too much of an idiot to believe her.'

'So, you stick to it, do you, that She- who must not be named is back- and I can turn you over to her and her girls if you don't become my lover?' Said Rita. Now how do you like that…? …Lowering her glass and exposing Naddalin, in ways that were wrong with a piercing stare while she fingers strayed longingly to the- clasp of her bra, in the low light of the café.'

'Your mine… all mine, now- I have paid to them for this… you can do this for me.'

Emmah did not like it, yet there was not a thing she could do, looking at this girl have her way, like always- you know who was at the bottom of it all, even in the press- it was rigged.

You stand by all the garbage Duerre's been telling everybody, even if you cannot prove a thing, about you, know who return, and be the blame, and you being the- sole witness, about Lily too, being in on it, like I am now- try it- and you be the one, looking crazy, and disport- and then I'll say you raped me- and I have the press behind me to say it… also- hey- you can sit your pretty little ass in the jail!'

Emmah ran and attacked, yet a magical beam of energy- from her hand pushed back flying and hitting the wall, wings out, and the fight was bloody between the two of them, fang ripping even, Emmah left limping away, and left-wing next broken if not completely, and her neck ripped open.

‘There will never- ever be- sole witness,’ snarled Naddalin, we get it- I know it.

There were dozen-odd death devourers there as well- all tricked to feel, I was the bad girl.

(Thought Naddalin-)

‘Want their names- Rita screamed it you feel you have a case?’

‘I’d love them all’ she said. And then moments after stated, ‘even if you do not get that kind of love- do you understand- So-o you say whatever you like, and do whatever you like to me- quite honestly…

I don’t care either way,’ breasted Naddalin. Now fumbling in her bag once more- for a tissue, and gazing at her as though she- was the- most beautiful thing she would- had ever seen- yet she had too as if she were under her spell and she was- or

just playing the game of not have a choice.'

A great bold headline: '- Blames…' A subheading- saying: Culpability, 'Naddalin -

The name was there as the mastermind to a story that was too hard to believe: all of them were there, and newly named- 'The Death Sisters' are still among us, and the mother the most powerful of all- has been reviled.'

Besides, then beneath a nice big photograph of you, 'Disturbed teenage survivor of you know who attacks the innocent, like Naddalin-, for

over 100 years, and it also reviled that she was- NEVAEH, causing outrage all day, by accusing respectable and prominent members of the- magician and fallen angel community…''

There was a sound of heavy footsteps, then the- door creaked open slightly.

Emmah stood there with her eyes red and swollen, tears splashing down her- in front of her face, say you never told me this, yet I realize why you could not.

For once, someone did something for me… and you know they

are going to kill her for this… yet, I have to say thank you, and move on- or it will eat at me like cancer.

‘Also, you’ve heard everything now? Has it changed anything with you?’

‘Not at all…’ she said back.

And the screams were heard for Malcolm- the girls burrowed, their- fangs into her flesh, sucking the life out of Rita's neck, yet she will always be remembered- in the graveyard with a stone, that is the largest around- for helping me, for her outspoken words of having a voice, and courage, sometimes

a friend is a girl, that you would least expect.

The question for me though is still- WHY!